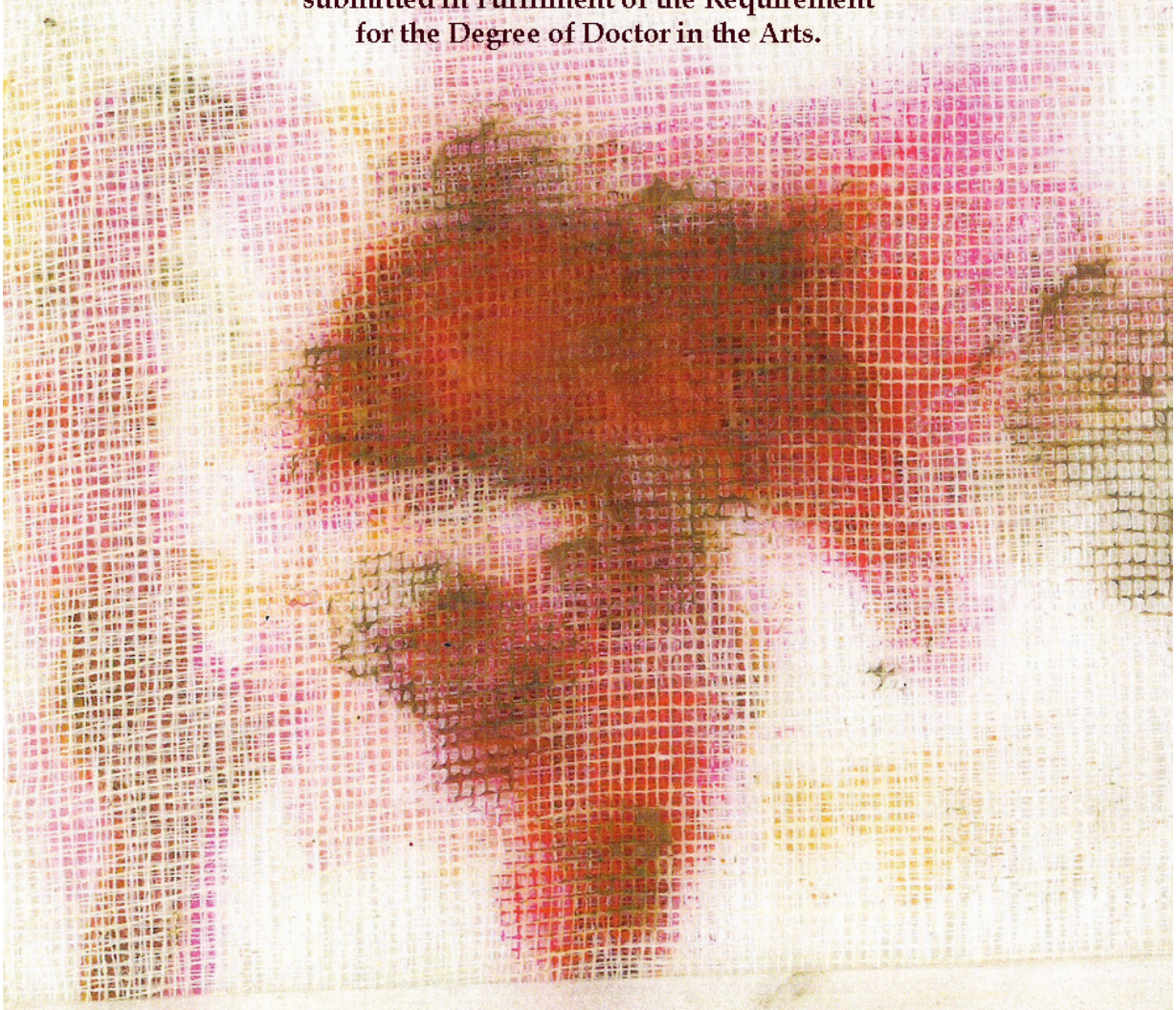
Hybrid Heroes

- and -

Ambiguous Empathy

Dissertation and two theatre performances
(The Borgia Trilogy and Each One Alone)
submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirement
for the Degree of Doctor in the Arts.



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Lay-out: Mariet de Kegel

Hybrid heroes and Ambiguous Empathy is a dissertation by Benjamin Van Tourhout (2018) presented at the University of Leuven and Luca-School of Arts (Leuven, Belgium).

for Hugo
‘cause you make me

Art, it is said, is not a mirror, but a hammer: it does not reflect, it shapes. But at present even the handling of a hammer is taught with the help of a mirror.
(Literature and Revolution, Leon Trotsky)

Ripley: What you're doing is wrong.
Luther: Yeah, I know.
Ripley: Why do it then?
Luther: 'Cause it's right.
(*Luther*, Neil Cross)

Als ge omkeert wat normaal is, kunt ge daar veel voordeel mee doen
(If common things are turned upside-down, one benefits greatly.)
(*Borgia Trilogy*, Benjamin Van Tourhout)

The embrace between Good and Evil was too intimate
on the night of that godforsaken wedding between heaven and hell that gave birth to *this* humanity, they are too intertwined to ever be separated again, to allow anyone to say:
This is well done and this is bad,
this leads to the Good and this leads to Evil.
Too late!
(Der Verdacht/Suspicion, Friedrich Dürrenmatt)

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Introduction

I hope the following text sheds light on the work I have done but moreover I hope it can inspire the readers.

The pages that are lying in front of you are far from what I had in mind in 2013 as the questions and the impact have changed fundamentally. I shifted my research away from historical heroes (as I started with research questions on the contemporary status of heroes in fiction) and away from a research limited to the theatre (as I broadened the research to all sorts of narrating media).
Both decisions gave air to the project but, furthermore, opened doors towards a series of fascinating and international researchers and research projects.

Since I am the first to conduct a Ph.D. in the Arts within LUCA-drama and the Humanities of the University of Leuven I have felt the pressure to set the bar in this pioneering research field. On the one hand, I have tried to research with an academic viewpoint and, on the other, to discuss and evaluate the material from an artistic point. I stood in the middle of two worlds and have been both praised and blamed for choosing that position. It is no secret that, within the artistic and academic world, many oppose to a Ph.D. in the Arts. Some because they see it as a devaluation of academic titles and others because they see it as a Faustian sell-off from artistic integrity. I hope that I can answer both points of critique and U-turn it towards enthusiasm for this specific sort of research.

This text will discuss the themes and elements I worked with over the past few years. I left the initial research questions not because they proved useless (I would love to turn my attention to them in the future) but because I gradually saw more and more signs and examples of a changing heroic face which I eventually labelled as the *hybrid hero*. Just because I focussed on what heroes in fiction were and how they had impacted audiences, I realised that a contemporary heroic face was emerging, just when I researched historic heroes, their ancestors of the hybrids.

The ambiguity of heroes seems to have reached new heights in recent times and I saw a contemporary interpretation of heroism: An interpretation that played with the heroic and anti-heroic ingredients. Next to that, the characters I have created over the years fell into place as they seemed to answer the call of this contemporary hero.
Ambiguity is inherently connected to heroes, yet I believe this wish for ambiguity has become stronger in recent times. It seems audiences are in need of heroes who no longer confirm commonly accepted moral paradigms

but challenge them, and it seems that creators are eager to develop such challenging fictional characters. Within this text I will discuss reasons and background for this process, as I see a strong link between events in society and the fictional answer. In this sense, I belong to those who believe that the arts can be both the mirror and the hammer of society.

The combination between creating and reflecting, between researching and rehearsing is essential as both influence each other; it is often hard to tell which came first, the artistic idea or a theoretical framework. The fluent process between both is inspiring, unpredictable and is the base for this research project.

Because of this reciprocal process, the research will be different from regular research as it will sometimes speak out more bluntly, skip some steps as it draws from the artistic and academic world. I hope the reader accepts this personal path and its methodology, concepts and development of ideas.
The emerging hybrid heroes in my artistic work combined with a growing body of work emerging on all sorts of media (in TV series, film, theatre, novels) gave an urgency to my research which inspired me and gave me the boost to head into new directions. It will hopefully lead to thought-provoking discussions on the proposals I make within this text.

The first part (Towards the hybrid hero) tries to evoke the process of this research, from questioning heroes, heroism, their empathic and moral impact, to the description of hybrid heroes.
I set out with a description of *The Borgia Trilogy* and *Each One Alone* (Chapter 1) to give a clear image of what the performances intended, how they unfolded and what their impact was (both on audiences and my practice). I then turn towards an exploration of heroism and empathy (Chapter 2 and 3) and its moral impact on audiences (chapter 4). All the material is then used as a mould to describe and elaborate the hybrid hero (chapter 5).
The second part (Onwards with the (hybrid) hero) is more practice based and can be seen as a toolbox, a personal kit of tools I developed over the years to create and/or develop heroes.

The concept of the hybrid hero, has been discussed fiercely in different conferences. During these conferences, I was mostly challenged on two points, being the time of emergence (as I see 9/11 as the starting point for narrative shifts) and on the actual novelty of the hybrid hero (can they not be categorised as anti-heroes or villains?). I hope to answer both elements as I do see a shift in how creators used narratives to shape and share their views and how audiences became susceptible to these hybrid heroes. Whether they are new is, in my opinion, not so much the question; the fact

that they appear, or re-appear, is already worth mentioning. But I do see some specifics that are, in my opinion, reserved for hybrid heroes (among others, mixing features from both the classic hero and classic villain while holding the empathic rapport with their audiences). Let me be clear, it is neither my intention nor my purpose to *invent* a heroic character, nor is the novelty in itself important to me. I want to share my thoughts and findings as I remain silent on the changes I see in fictional narratives.

Just as I present the hybrid hero, it seems my research status is hybrid as I have been like Janus, watching both in academic and artistic directions. I hope this leads to an inspiring and readable text.

Over the past few years I had the opportunity to meet passionate researchers from all over the world, and had the privilege to share my thoughts with them. With this text, I hope to do the same and share what I have thought and worked on. This text can be seen as work-in-progress, as a rehearsal on paper, or as *surfing* as Baricco (2014) defined the restless search for meaning whereby thrills, polarisation and experiences are essential. I skimmed over the water of earlier researchers, creators, philosophers and they gave me the chance to sail and to develop my own thoughts.

I am often asked what I think of concrete person X or Y, or what makes people heroic. I always answer that I limit myself to discussing fictional heroes, just as in the following text. Although I do make statements on the possible impact of fictional heroes on real audiences or on how (I believe) reality helps shaping heroes, none of my claims on heroes should be understood as an opinion on actual persons. If I, in the following text, use names as Rodrigo Borgia, Gilles de Rais (who actually lived) they must be regarded as a fictional re-creation, as characters in our plays (thus, if I formulate opinions on such historical characters I speak about and judge the creations not the actual persons).

The following text describes a journey,
whether it is a heroic one remains to be seen.

Benjamin
(Gent, Leuven, Freiburg, Berlin, 2013-2017)

Fig. 1: The Borgia Trilogy - Part I, Homo Carnale © Bram Vandeveire - NUNC

"Since ancient times, heroes and heroines have been crucial to the self-understanding of cultures and communities in and beyond Europe. Although some scholars claim that we are currently living in a "post-heroic age," recent years have witnessed a new wave of interest in hero(in)es, both within the scholarly community and in culture at large. The hero(in)es that populate contemporary culture are of quite heterogeneous character and often part of long traditions, but they, and the concept of the hero as such, also meet with the scepticism and are even explicitly rejected."[1]

("Heroes - Heroizations - Heroisms. Transformations and Conjunctures from Antiquity to the Modern Day" - Collaborative Research Center 948 – University of Freiburg)

First Funding Period: July 2012 - June 2016 Research Program)

https://www.sfb948.uni-freiburg.de/kurzprofil-en/forschung/?page=1

[1] Source: https://www.sfb948.uni-freiburg.de/kurzprofil-en/forschung/?page=1

Glossary

Due to the fact that words as hero, anti-hero or empathy have so many different meanings and layers -depending on the viewpoint and the research field- I feel the need to start with a glossary. The definitions of these words are not universally applicable but will be used within this text. (Chapter 2 and 3 will go deeper into defining heroism and empathy)

Hero:
"A person who is admired for their courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities" (OED)

Anti-hero:
Holds two basic culturally defined meanings:
a) A tragic figure, who does not achieve the goal or according to Van Dale a "personage dat eeuwig verliest" (transl: "a character that eternally loses").[2]
b) A figure which lacks the qualities of a hero or a hero with vices: "a protagonist or notable figure who is conspicuously lacking in heroic qualities" according to Merriam-Webster. [3]
To avoid confusion, I will mostly speak off *flawed hero*: A flawed hero is a hero with flaws (either flawed in characteristics or flawed achievements), these result in vices and/or the inability to achieve the goal.

Villain:
"A man of ignoble ideas or instincts" and "an unprincipled or depraved scoundrel; a man naturally disposed to base or criminal actions, or deeply involved in the commission of disgraceful crimes" (OED)

Empathy:
I will use the definition of Carl Rogers (1957): "to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the as if condition."

Empathy versus Sympathy:
In order to be as clear as possible I draw from the same source (Rodgers, 1957) to define sympathy: "To express sympathy is to make it known that you are aware of another's distress and that you have compassion for them.
In short:
Feeling *for* someone is feeling sympathy, feeling *as* someone is feeling empathy.

[2] Source: http://www.vandale.nl/gratis-woordenboek/betekenis/nederlands/antiheld
[3] Source: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/antihero

Creator:
I use the word creator rather than director, author, performer, etc. because creation processes are no longer based on clear-cut configurations. Performers, set-designers, composers etc. are in many cases as important as authors, performers or directors. With the word *creator*, I hope to be inclusive.

Enjoyment/Entertainment:

The words enjoyment and entertainment return many times, often they are seen as interchangeable. Where the word enjoyment is used the reciprocal process of indulging in narratives (between creator and spectator) is emphasised and where the word entertainment is used the one-way direction form creator towards spectator is emphasised.

Narrative:

In this context, the word narrative will be used to describe the story; that what is happening within the fictional world.

I/We:

Throughout this text the pronouns *I* and *we* will be used interchangeably because creating and researching is as much individual as collective work, some thoughts are more personal, while the theatrical accomplishments are only possible due to the commitment of the whole group.)

Part I:

Towards the Hybrid Hero

1.1 Chapter 1: Artistic practice & the research

Theatre performances: The Borgia Trilogy and Each One Alone.

This research originates in my artistic practice; it was there that unconsciously and just under the surface two basic ingredients were hiding: The (historic) hero and empathy. The hero is a character with a "thousand faces" (Campbell, 2008) and empathy is a "mechanism for prosocial behaviour" (De Waal, 2010)
These two elements are essential in my work and it was during the creation of the first part of the *Borgia trilogy* that I came to realise that something odd was going on: the audience seemed to like, to empathise with Pope Rodrigo Borgia (known as Alexander VI). Despite the fact that I had created a pope who was, to say the least, not a classic hero. Audiences gloated and even choose sides with him. This made me wonder: how can fiction lure audiences into accepting and empathising with fictional behaviour they would avoid or despise in reality? Is it because it is safe to feel as a fictional villain? Is it because the hero is historic? Is it because watching villains is a form of cathartic cleansing? Or is just plain entertainment without any strings attached?

I wondered if there was more that I, as author and director, could do to influence that process. There must be tools, dramatic structures that help facilitating empathy. Soon I found myself reading, thinking on heroism and empathy. It was clear that the combination of both container-concepts held many challenges as both words hide many variations and interpretations both in the academic and artistic world.

I believe this text can be read with my glasses, being that of a researching creator. Therefore, the artistic practice will be the touchstone and the test-lab while the theoretical research will reach out, back up and describe conclusions and tools. This vice versa is essential in this research project as its focus lies in developing tools to combine heroism and empathy in narratives (especially within the field of the performing arts) without peaky blinders and secondly to reach out to both the academic and artistic world to share knowledge and results. Both worlds share the same love and passion for narratives, the impact of fiction is the starting point of our mutual work.

Therefore, it seemed essential to reason from two artistic points of view:
The viewpoint of the director with a focus on the impact of heroism and empathy within audiences, thus the search for reflection and affect.
The viewpoint of the author with a focus on the structure and dramatic tools to develop challenging heroic characters.

The outcome will hopefully be interesting enough to both academics and creators. The following is thus not an objective or clean text, it is subjective, it uses knowledge, concepts and ideas of others and draws conclusions from them.
Consider this text as a creative process on paper, a sharing of conflicting opinions that are discussed and have led to the development of a contemporary interpretation of a heroic archetype; the hybrid hero.

1.1.1. Why?

Both heroes and history are basic building blocks within my artistic practice; this research allows me to investigate both on a more profound level.

Defining what and who is a hero is challenging as it seems that almost everyone has its own personal set of heroic features a character must possess in order to be labelled as a hero. There are some basic heroic ingredients but even these must be seen with bias as every context (both in time and space) has its impact on the appreciation and creation of heroes. The fact that a character is labelled as heroic lies completely in the eye of the beholder as heroism is a container-concept that hides so many layers and interpretations leading to overstretching by some or contempt by others.
Looking back at my artistic work I must conclude I have always chosen heroes who act ambiguously or have ambiguous goals to reach. Next to that I have often chosen historic heroes which I re-created.

Why heroes?
Heroes try to transform their contexts and while doing so are often transformed themselves. They are pivotal characters who can *suck* and *seduce* audiences into the narrative and while doing so make audiences forget reality and often even ethics. Heroism and morality are, in my opinion, two interconnected elements because heroes will, in most cases, react or oppose to a situation based on their moral paradigm and these heroic actions can in return inspire audiences.

Heroes are mostly seen as the quintessence of narratives but do not necessarily play by the ethical rules. This ambiguous duality fascinates me, as I have empathised with monsters who were portrayed as heroes, I have shouted just like Micky and Mallory Knox (*Natural Born Killers*, Oliver Stone, 1984), cried over the death of Captain James Cook (Australian TV Series, Gordon, 1987), felt the rush of Phileas Fogg (Verne, 1873), understood Jeanne d'Arc, imitated and dressed up as Robin Hood, etc.
The moment I learned about their existence I tried to become them, I played them and tried to be them in my imagination.

Even if these characters were once actual living people, it is their heroic (and sometimes fictionalised) narrative that made them into how we perceive them today.

Heroes have always been an essential part of my imaginative world but my version of Robin Hood was not always noble and held most of the candy for himself, my Micky Knox was scared at night, my James Cook lost his way in the Pacific Ocean, my Jeanne d'Arc was a petrified boy.
My childish imagination did, unknowingly, what would later become an essential part of my practice: it transformed a narrative and presented the *other* side, not only to show that heroes have domestic lives or petty characteristics but to search common ground between the hero and me (the audience).

Within my work I try to find an empathy with unexpected characters which can sometimes lead to scary resemblances between the hero and audience and/or between the hero, villain and audience because after all, "I am human, and nothing of that which is human is alien to me." (Terentius, 163 B.C) [4]

This crossing of shared congruence is where I start to write these pages, to reflect on heroism and the empathy it evokes. Heroes are the perfect vehicle to share my dreams, my opinions, my imagination.

Heroes? I love to hate them and I hate to love them.

Why history? Why historic heroes?
The more time passes between us and events in the past, the more the characters and their actions turn into objects for fictionalisation, as if time covers those characters and events with a layer of stardust.

History lies in the past, which leaves creators with opportunities to rewrite, change, adapt facts and model biographies into narratives.

Next to that, the conglomerate of (wonderful) narratives has - since the dawn of narratives - helped humans to share, console, explain the world that surrounds them. The existence of myths, epic tales, tragedies and comedies, TV-series and movies - with daredevils and cowards, with sensuality and deep grief, adultery and faithfulness, murder and love - is what make us

[4] Translation from: "*Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*", by Terentius in his play *Heauton* Timorumenos (The Self-tormentor).

humans, the fact that we *can* create is our essence (since it comes so naturally we tend to forget this uniqueness).

Memory and the cycle of history are two elements that can be used as a tool to rewrite history into a contemporary mirror or hammer for today's society. Memory fools us because what we remember is mainly *how* we choose to remember and thus not exactly what has happened, because of that creators can add their version of the truth, their facts to the cycle.
As the truth is not what I am after, I feel free to re-write history to make my (ethical) point; I rewrite history to speak out on today.
History is a canvas where truth depends on the source, where creators can draw their own line of events. Because we cannot go back in time, history is the playground of creators (just as the future is) to play as a puppet master with kings and queens, popes and revolutionaries, good and bad.
But re-writing history comes with consequences, as it is a small step to framing opinions or to propaganda. The thin line between sharing one's thoughts through history and trying to shape the minds of others, is the fascinating and challenging interplay between history, creators and audience.

History?
History is death; therefore, it can be reanimated and breathe life into today's and tomorrows world.

Why ambiguous heroes and ambiguous histories?
The bad guys, the villains fascinated both creators and audiences, I am no exception.
Richard III, Macbeth, Micky and Mallory Knox, Gilles de Rais, Rodrigo Borgia are all characters that do what we are *not ought* to, they dare to act where we should stop. Would that be the reason? That they take what they can and we lack the courage or hide ourselves behind ethics?

Badness and misery sells, it seduces, it is what we like … in fiction.
Would that be the reason? That we love to see misfortune happening in the safe environment of fiction? Where we can witness - without responsibility - cruel and gruesome actions taking place? With an impact on others - who do not even exist anyway?

Narratives are creations, seeking for impact, therefore creators structure events in order to evoke emotions and thoughts within audiences. Therefore, this research project will try to find answers on the interplay between empathy, heroes and narratives.

It will draw from the findings in, among others, the field of the psychology, neurology and artistic practice. It will look for the connection between empathy for historical and fictional heroes and/or villains. It will come up with an heroic model that could, in my opinion, only originate in post 9/11 times: the hybrid hero. It will be a personal roadmap as it originated in the field.

Fig. 2: The Borgia Trilogy - Part II, Homo Fatale
© Bram Vandeveire - NUNC

1.1.2. Germs in the practice

It all started in 2003 when I, for the first time, wrote and directed a play. I choose an historical figure, paintress Maria Bashkirtseff (1858-1884) as I saw many similarities between her hunger for fame in 1880's and the emergence of talent shows in the early 2000's like X-factor, Idols, Big Brother (where one can discuss whether the talent or the show is central).[5]

I researched the massive diaries by Bashkirtseff and created a play whereby ambition versus disappointment served as the theme. This was the first time I used the past to reflect on *today*. The performance was titled *Je suis une étoile* (2003) as the hunger for fame connected both the aspirations of Bashkirtseff and those of the candidates in these popular talent shows.

Later plays based on the lives of Gilles de Rais, Maria Stuart, Evariste Galois, Rodrigo Borgia followed. In all of these plays the contemporary connection formed the base and starting point to create (be it similarities in context, behaviour, actions, theme and a critical response to such similarities).

Motivation and Background

My work focusses on two main elements, historic heroes whom I re-write in order to speak freely about today's issues and empathy with such heroes who are ambiguous and behave - to say the least - ambiguously.

Sometimes *outsiders* are more capable of summarizing my artistic work in a clear and poignant way. Therefore, I use some press reviews on the *Borgia*

[5] For more on the performance *Je suis une étoile*, see: Van Tourhout, B. (2018). What is to be gained by weeping? (a theatrical case study based on the diary of Marie Bashkirtseff). *Interférences Littéraires / Literaire Interferenties*. (submitted for publication)

Trilogy (2014) and *Raisonnez* (2005) [6]: "NUNC seduces its audience in a five-hour long performance, presenting the animalistic Rodrigo Borgia. … Vital and vivacious. The Borgia trilogy is delightful theatre." (Hillaert, 2014), "Sizzling, carefully designed and played with joie de vivre this is play on the heartrending monster Rodrigo Borgia, … Sturdy, almost iconic stories such as that of the Borgia are his curtain beyond which Van Tourhout shows the helplessness, the monstrosity, the avidity and the vulnerability of modern man." (Van Steenberghe, 2012).
Earlier reviews spoke of *Raisonnez* whereby the motivation for the gruesome murdering of children by Gilles de Rais was the focus: "De Rais lost his wit and surrendered to revenge leading to perversities which can be linked to the current post-Dutroux-times, child-soldiers, etc. Van Tourhout chooses to transform such cruelties into celestial singing and a non-realistic way of acting. (Arteel, 2005), "Raisonnez, a dark fairy-tale of a king at war who hates war, who gradually evolves into killing the innocent children in his land. The unreasonable God is answered with the unreasonable killing of children. It leads to musical and visual pearls. It is haunting and captivating music-theatre remembering us of the dark paintings of Goya. (Laveyne, 2005).

These press-quotes all focus on the monstrosity, the desire but moreover on the fascination and the attraction (even the entertaining value) of watching such monsters as Rodrigo Borgia or Gilles de Rais. The enjoyment of audiences, the empathy with *bad* people in fiction holds the same fear and fascination as the apple of Eden (which is perhaps the first story on attractive wrongdoings).
Presenting the ambiguous or plain wrong through fiction is tempting for audiences and creators, it has been both a reason to attack and to defend the arts.

Should the arts present exemplary behaviour (as Aristotle suggests) or counter-exemplary behaviour (as I will suggest) to evoke empathy and subsequentially critical and ethical reflection. Is enjoying ambiguous fiction *bad*? Is watching it - and not protesting or leaving the theatre - an implicit agreement? A guilty pleasure? And if so, does this have any long-term effects in real life? Or is it merely a decompression for audiences? Perhaps it is a contemporary Dionysus or cathartic effect?

To be clear, the fact that my characters can behave badly or at least ambiguously is not my essential point of interest, it is what this badness evokes within audiences and how creators can lure audiences into accepting - even whitewashing - such goals and actions.

[6] Originally written in Dutch, my translations.

Fiction allows audiences to empathise with characters who would be ignored, despised or even punished in reality. This effect is even stronger – in my opinion- when it concerns historical figures (because, among others, the spatial distance) whereby the audience does not have the chance or wish to (fact-)check and is thus encouraged to accept the imagination of the creators.

The research purposes can be summarised as:
- research the congruence between heroes and empathy,
- research the congruence between empathy and audience,
- (and thus) research the congruence between heroes and audience through empathy.

These will all be discussed from an artistic point of view (creators and director's standpoint). This focus will automatically lead to a personal idiom and tone, sometimes more straightforward or bluntly than one can expect from a Ph.D. As always with theatre, it is the floor that decides, because what happens on the stage is what counts for creators. The proof lies in the execution of actions, it is there that the exciting space (or arena) will lead to success and failures in the search for empathy with heroes and/or villains. It is within the live context that a tangible rapport between performers and audience will be researched and hopefully inspire new work to come.

The performances *Each one alone* and *The Borgia trilogy* will be used as case studies to give concrete examples, clarify tools and a point of reference throughout this text. The vice versa between creation and reflection, the reciprocal nature between rehearsing and researching is one that constantly renders input and inspiration. It is often impossible to say whether the creation or the research takes the lead as both steer each other.
The collaboration with performers and musicians on the one hand and academics on the other has been essential during the course of this research and I believe the combination of both is definitely more than the mere sum of both.

These performances can be seen as a practical conclusion and therefore form an essential part of this research.
First the performance *Each one alone will* be briefly described (due to timing of the performance and this text) while the Borgia trilogy which closed in 2016, will be discussed at-length.
I want to emphasise that these performances are on the one hand used as case study but that they also had to be able to *survive* the artistic quality test.

They had to be more than an example or a presentation of a concept, as I believe that this type of research should serve both artistic and research goals.

1.1.3. Each One Alone [7]

Since I use history as a tool, a canvas to write worlds that reflect on today's paradigms, and since I play with the empathy one can develop for fictional characters, the French Revolution seemed to be the perfect canvas to work with today (2017-2018).
A world whereby demagogues and populists try to answer the anxieties of the citizens. Simple solutions for complex problems seems to be the device: (and just as war-heroes) these demagogues mostly focus on the *own* community: they see solutions in building walls, expel groups of people, etc. all in search for their *pure* citizen who they claim to serve.

This chaotic, sometimes pathetic and lamentable way of discussing ideas made me reflect on how I could *playfully* answer this state. Not in the least because I saw so many similarities between the years of the French Revolution (1789-1794) and today: the Arabic Spring, Indignados, the Ukraine revolution, Black Lives Matter Movement, Umbrella revolution, Tea Party, Occupy Wall-street, etc.
There are so many voices, so many demagogues at work on all sides to use the despair, the fear and the hopes of their audiences that I could not resist. I had to answer this delta of opinions and create a play that uses empathy, rhetoric and demagogue tunnel visions.

Therefore, all well-known characters have their part in the play: Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, their son Louis XVII, Robespierre and Danton. Two more characters will be added, Antoine Simon (a character we developed based on our needs) and a moderator.

The play falls apart in two parts:

Part 1:
The audience is divided in four sub-groups and each sub-group goes to a unique place in the theatre where one hears one monologue by a character. The four characters will be: Marie-Antoinette, the dauphin Louis XVII, Robespierre and Antoine Simon. Audiences will, thus, hear only one voice – one tunnel vision. They have no idea who the other sub-groups encounter, or which voice and content they experience. (When audiences arrive in the theatre they must choose between four different coloured stickers, this

[7] *Each One Alone* is described more briefly as the rehearsal period and the writing of this text overlap. More profound research results will appear in the future.

choice will then decide which monologue they will see, as e.g. the green stickers see Marie-Antoinette, while the blue stickers are led to Robespierre.)

Part 2:
This second part brings all the different sub-groups together (without any time to reflect or chat among them). Then a fierce debate will unfold between the characters, whereby opposing opinions will clash as hard and passionately as possible.

With this concept, we play with tunnel-visions and truth (as all opinions in part 1 were presented as the genuine truth):
-audiences do not have all the info (propaganda and boycott)
-audiences feel intimately together, privileged (they form a group, an *us*)
-the monologues are written and performed with the sole prospect of attracting empathy (we will use demagogic, rhetoric tricks, re-writing of history, victimizing oneself, accusing others, emotional outburst, plain lying)

The performers of the monologues will try to convince, try to win the hearts of their audience:
- Marie-Antoinette will play the mother card, she will contest the image of a sexually obsessed queen who has raped her son.
- Their son, le dauphin will be taken away from his parents and will tell us how he was treated by Antoine Simon and how he was brutally killed in prison
- Robespierre will explain why had he had to evoke the terror commission, how he opposed to the guillotine but saw no other option when the royal family tried to flee France.
- Antoine Simon (based on different characters) will explain how and why he mistreated le dauphin but also how he was forced to do so and above all how he tried to undo his actions.

During the second part audiences will learn other points of view, discover other truths, see contradictions and know they have been tricked and lied to, they will hear the same story but with other foci, other emotional effects, etc.

The form of part 2 is partially based upon the debate and speech-culture and uses similar means. We will put out fire with gasoline and in a fierce, passionate and aggressive debate where all the different truths and different lies will conflict. Next to that the moderator will gradually become less and less objective and will turn into a prosecutor with his own agenda.

Some questions must be answered, and will lead to ferocious fights:
- Was it fair that Marie-Antoinette was falsely blamed of an incestuous relation with her son?

- Was it fair that Danton was killed by Robespierre?
- Was it fair to blame Robespierre when he was no longer able to extinguish the revolutionary fire?
- Was it fair that little prince Louis needed re-education and had to die in prison?
- Was it fair that King Louis XVI was beheaded?
- Was it fair that Simon hesitated when he saw the sobbing little prince?

In the end, audiences will have to re-evaluate their initial connection and empathy with the characters. Some things will prove to be a lie, other things will be kept a secret, conflicting facts will have to be compared.
The audience will be the centre of it all.

Their empathy, their reflection, their presence will be essential.
Also, the title of the play will be proven as true: as Each one *will* be Alone in the end.

1.1.4. The Borgia trilogy

The following pages describe the (long) process (2007-2016) and development of this trilogy. I hope this description leads to insights on the artistic work, the research questions the methods and the eventual output.

The project started with the first research trip to Rome in 2007 and ended with the last performance of the Borgia trilogy on March 22nd, 2016, a unique date we will remember as the day both the city centre and the airport of Brussels were attacked by terrorists. It was our last performance and we had to decide – as a group – whether we would perform the last performance as planned despite the chaos and fear on the streets. We decided that playing theatre was the best thing we could do. The final words of Rodrigo Borgia: "Don't be afraid." had a special meaning that night, both for the performers, the crew and for the audience. In a shocked country, this message coming from a Borgia was, if possible, even more ambiguous and hybrid.

Origins
The main reason I started with the Borgia trilogy lies within the fact I deduced certain similarities between now and then. The Borgia became known as a family that did not care about the consequences of its actions, that saw ethics as an annoying or obstructive element in life as the Borgia had patience nor scruples.
This impatience and the denouncement of responsibility was something I also recognised in contemporary times. It is not for nothing that the subtitle of Part 1: Homo Carnale was *I want it, because I want it*.

Fig. 3: The Borgia Trilogy - Part II, Homo Fatale
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It all started back in the 1990's when I first heard of pope Rodrigo Borgia (Alexander VI) who had a *spectacular* life with his family in the Vatican and perhaps most intriguingly, he had orgies within these sacred walls. What I then learned was that a *devil* could exist in a *heavenly* place: the place where some divinity should have taken place was a brothel, a party-house.
This contradiction intrigued me from the first minute and from then I gradually started to collect material concerning this family (from historical novels, biographies, movies, etc.).
But it was only in 2007 I took on the challenge and went to Rome to investigate the Borgia family myself.

2007-2008: Homo Carnale

The first research trip to Rome was perhaps the most exciting one, at least seen from a Dan Brown-perspective. As it was unclear if and how I would get into the archives of the Vatican, the whole endeavour was exciting and scary at the same time.
Before I left I had no intention to create a trilogy (nor could I estimate the impact of this project on my further life). To say the least, it was an exciting experience trying to get access to the *Archivio Segreto Vaticano* and the *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, to say the least. [8]

The mere mentioning of the word 'Borgia' already let to fear in librarians' eyes, long silences, nervous smiles and long telephone calls to whoknowswho. I soon learned that the word still had a pejorative ring in Italy, even outside the Vatican or other catholic institutions. Being labelled as a *Borgia* is certainly not a good opening.

[8] Next to that I worked in the Academia Belgica, Accademia di Danimarca, American Academy in Rome, Biblioteca Canatense, Bibloteca Nazionale, British school at Rome, Det Norske Institutti, Escuela Espanola de Historia y Arqueología, Instituto Austriaco, Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, Istituto Svizzero di Roma, Koninklijk Nederlands Instituut, LUMSA Biblioteca, Norwegian Institute, Svenska Institutet.

In between: To be clear from the first instant: I do not connect the Borgia family with faith or the catholic church, that would be the same as e.g. measuring the values of Marx and Engels against the doings of Mao or Stalin.)

Fig. 4: Archivum Secretum Vaticanum, Città dell'Vaticano
© Benjamin Van Tourhout

During this period in Rome it felt as if I was in research-heaven, the parchments letters, the seals, the librarians, it all looked as if I was indeed acting in a Dan Brown movie. Entering Vatican City through the Via Sant' Anna was exciting on every occasion. While the Swiss guards saluted me, I encountered the Vatican society from within (with its own pharmacy, post-office, shops, etc.) and I soon learned that the whole building was filled with legends and conspiracy theories but perhaps the strangest thing was - in the middle of the Vatican! - a coffee bar (which offered liquor and snickers, too).
This anomaly proved to be a very inspiring place: all of a sudden, I witnessed both researchers and clergy together (sometimes a bit tipsy, sometimes enjoying a nap, sometimes surprisingly open on the topic I researched).

The Archivio Segreto Vaticano has been my main source of information, because they hold the actual letters from and to Rodrigo Borgia. These letters are no longer complete - some are lost or at least no longer in the Vatican - and this leads to all sort of conspiracy theories. Some believe it were earlier librarians who stole the parchments, even Napoleon himself has been mentioned.
All these theories remain inconclusive but represent the atmosphere of safekeeping, secrecy and the construction of legends that surround the Borgia family. I would soon add my own version to the pile.

This first work period focussed on the Borgia family and their emergence in Italy, Rome and eventually in the Vatican. It was during this research period I came to realise that if I wanted to *tell* something that was more than resuming the highlights I needed more time. In these archives, the concept of the trilogy was born, it seemed obvious as I witnessed triptychs on a daily basis in almost every church I visited.
Three would be a good structural element too, as Lucrezia had to marry three times because Rodrigo used his daughter for financial gain as she was married or divorced with one or the other Italian prince and thus with an

Italian state. Lucrezia would eventually marry Giovanni Sforza, Alfonso di Aragon and Alfonso d'Este.

Despite all the work in the archives it was clear from the beginning that I would not create documentary theatre, nor that the truth would prevail over dramatic tension. This means that I *used* the sources as a tool and not as the mean.
I do not search to *explain* certain behaviour of the past; I do search characters that I can re-create in order to let them comment or mirror today's world.
The past thus, comes as the tool which makes my work different from that of historians.
I am not seeking for the factual truth; I am seeking truthfulness and probity- which makes a big difference in how one relates to the sources. I use history as the inspiration to create something new.

Initially, my focus was on the difference between what a pope *ought to do* in contrast with what Rodrigo (and his family) actually did. They should have been exemplary leaders (as many classic heroes are) but were counter-examples.

A Roman Eureka moment occurred to me when I realised that presenting fictional counter-examples could be an asset in today's world. As audiences have - especially since Post-Modernism - become *allergic* to moral messages or exemplary behaviour in the narratives.

Fig. 5: The Borgia Appartments, Città dell' Vaticano
© Benjamin Van Tourhout

It is my experience that contemporary audiences are no longer happy with clean and obvious morality in narratives, but that audiences love to discover moral questions themselves rather than having them explained for them.

While touring, we witnessed how audiences discussed morality and narratives on a broad scale. It has thus become a *play* with the audience to wrap the morality in such a way that it is not too obvious but still possible to discover while experiencing the performance.

It seemed to me that the Borgia family could be the perfect vehicle to do just that: wrap counter-examples into flamboyant characters which - through their counter behaviour - could lead to moral reflection. Little did I know then that this counter behaviour would form the essence of the last part of the trilogy and the development of what I would label as the hybrid hero.

For the first part I decided to use the well-made-play form as inspiration to create the different acts and scenes as I saw many similarities between the tragedies of the Borgia world and Shakespeare's or Racine's' tragedies.

I tried to use the contradiction between *ought* to and *being* in the writing itself, therefore I chose to turn around the villainy as well. I created Rodrigo Borgia more as a clown, a happy family men then instead of - the commonly accepted depiction of Rodrigo as - a Machiavellian bitter, dark and ever plotting scoundrel. I tried to create a seductive character that seemed to be in contrast to his actions.
A bitter-sweet protagonist who has a universal goal (to provide shelter for the family) but uses ambiguous means to do that.
Next to this, the incestuous affair Rodrigo has with this daughter, Lucrezia, (which I added myself thus without much historical backup) was essential in part I. This rape scene was intended to counterbalance the gusto of Rodrigo.

Imagine my surprise when at opening night audiences gloated and chose to neglect e.g. the rape, the murders of Rodrigo. Audiences saw him as a picaresque hero, a flawed hero who - although misbehaving - was favoured above his opponents. Simply stated: audiences loved Rodrigo so much they chose to have moral peaky blinders. It seemed I had overstretched the counter-example, instead of resulting in condemnation or rejection audiences glorified Rodrigo. They laughed with his jokes, they loved how he tricked and fooled his opponents. I had created a monster but with the façade of a warm harlequin.

Although the press and audience rewarded the performance with a warm welcome I was in doubt: What did I do that audiences loved this raping monster? What did Rodrigo have that audiences consciously choose to ignore the gruesome killings? Was it because of his universal goal? Was it because of the jokes he made? Was it because he was a picaresque humourist?
I had overstretched the defence of the Borgia, the admiration for their wit, their poignant and luscious way of stating things, the jokes (sometimes even slapstick) had seduced audiences into accepting the Borgia.

I then decided we would create a trilogy whereby the audience and their reactions would stand central. How that would look like was at that time still unclear.

I chose to *wait* with the creation of part II, as I wanted to avoid the episodic structure. I wanted to detach myself and have a clear head to re-work what had been created. I believed that if I went on the week after opening night, my imagination (and that of the artistic team) would be tunnelled and that we would walk in our own footsteps. Therefore, we waited four years.
We created other plays in the mean time before we went on with this Borgia saga; whereby a flawed hero became admired, whereby paradoxically the audience loved what I hated, whereby I needed to address heroism and the appreciation of the ambiguous actions of the characters.

Fig. 6: The Borgia Trilogy - Part I, Homo Carnale
© Bram Vandeveire - NUNC

Synopsis: Homo Carnale

Rodrigo Borgia wins, through briberies and blackmailing, the conclave and calls himself Alexander VI. Rodrigo wins at the expense of Giuliano della Rovere (his life-long rival both in gaining power within the church as holding mistresses -as he had a yearlong affair with Vanozza Catanei, the current wife of Rodrigo). Della Rovere swears to revenge this loss but Rodrigo does not care for the moment as he -as planned- puts his children on all the key-positions in the Vatican structure: Joffre, as leader of the army, Cesare, as his right hand in the Vatican and Lucrezia as the marital trophy. None of the children is happy with the decisions of Rodrigo as Cesare wants the army, Joffre wants to be left alone and Lucrezia hates the chosen groom.
Rodrigo and Vanozza do not care whether their children are happy or not, as they must adapt to their dynastic scheme and have no time to lose with nagging children.

Giovanni Sforza is the chosen groom for Lucrezia; Rodrigo neglects the love Cesare has for his sister (since puberty Cesare has been madly in love with Lucrezia and because of that opposes to any marriage whatsoever).
Joffre must marry Sancia di Aragon, and since he is more or less openly gay this soon becomes the gossip of Rome and the other Italian states.

Rodrigo has, within the first year, given all positions to members of his own family and has connected the Borgia-family with Milan (Sforza) and Naples (di Aragon). On top of that, the year is 1492, so Columbus soon returns with the promise of countless amounts of gold.

Rodrigo soon falls for the charms of Sancia di Aragon himself, while Cesare prohibits Giovanni Sforza to touch Lucrezia, and since Rodrigo is rather fond of his Lucrezia too, he gladly uses Cesare's aggressive prohibition.

In the meantime, della Rovere has forged an alliance with France and the ambitious king Charles. Charles wants to achieve a place in the history books for himself and because of that sees a new crusade as the ideal tool. When he proposes this to Rodrigo, he is not only ignored but furthermore mocked as if he was a child. This Borgia behaviour is exactly what della Rovere had counted on. From now on he starts using Charles' pride as a tool to hurt the Borgias.

During the wedding party, Rodrigo can no longer contain himself and he rapes his daughter Lucrezia. Cesare, who witnesses this gruesome crime takes revenge by killing his brother, Joffre, whom he knows Rodrigo loves most, claiming that he only takes "a child for a child."
Rodrigo and Vanozza are shocked at this coldblooded murder. Lucrezia is broken, on the one hand she has been raped and on the other used as excuse to kill a brother.

What seemed to be an unbreakable bond between the Borgia now has evolved into thin air. Rodrigo is inconsolable; he has lost his favourite son, lost the chance for a grand-son with the Aragon Family and perhaps even worse, he has angered Cesare, Vanozza and Lucrezia.

It is only when the power of the Sforza family is declining that father and son find each other for a short while: it seems to them that Lucrezia must be *freed* from the Sforza's, therefore killing Giovanni Sforza is to the best way to do just that.

Della Rovere has instructed Charles to convene an army and Charles is more than happy to do so. They give the Borgia an ultimatum; they must accept the domination of Charles over Rome or they will be imprisoned.
Part I ends with Rodrigo being put in custody, together with his family.

Fig. 7: The Borgia Trilogy - Part I, Homo Carnale
© Bram Vandeveire - NUNC

2011-2013: Homo Fatale

Knowing what happened within the first part of the trilogy, I had to reflect on how I could respond to the audiences' indulgence. How to answer the uncritical reaction, the jubilation and enjoyment towards Rodrigo Borgia? Who despite the nepotism, the killings, the rape of his daughter was still considered to be funny, cool, even good and righteous.

In the years between the two performances the ideas on the impact of heroism fully struck me. What was it that audiences liked, and why did they accept actions in fiction which they would hate in reality? The safety of fiction?

Or, could it be that the performance, without my conscious knowledge, held some features that lured audiences into accepting un-ethical thoughts and actions or made audiences complicit because of background and, as a result of that, a shared tunnel vision with the protagonist, Rodrigo Borgia?

Next to that, creating a *second* part was an exciting endeavour as there is a *history* and a *future*. There are expectations: from audiences and press, dramatic lines to be followed, characters to be re-created, etc. Next to that, I myself had wishes and expectations, I wanted to have a new starting point and on top of that I wanted to *work* intensively on audiences' responses.

Therefore, I chose to *follow* the audience in its un-critical admiration for the Borgia clan, thus I went even further in the combination of clown and dictator; leading to even more jokes, slapstick and jubilation of the Borgia. (I assume that audiences by this time already knew that what we presented

was no longer a historic reconstruction, left alone that historic truth was within our framework or scope).

On a more dramatic level, the Borgia reasoned more and more in circles, thus explaining away their own wrongness. By evoking 'necessity' as reason they allowed themselves to murder their way through society. It was my hope that audiences would gloat in this –one could say- circus of misbehaviour.

We left out all religious connotations in Part II, as I did not want to comment on the church (others did that before me) nor did I believe that the Borgia family was exemplary for religion or that religion provoked their behaviour. In short, religion was not my cup of tea. I wanted to show how people like the Borgia use any system for their own benefit, ignoring the cost and effect for others. Such Borgia-characters are not suffering from a lack of empathic ability but choose to ignore such sentiments as long as their own schemes are left alone. I came to define such characters as pathological narcissists, it is not that they do not feel for the others, it is that such feelings do not weigh or are not decisive when it comes to decision making.

Fig. 8: The Borgia Trilogy - Part II, Homo Fatale
© Bram Vandeveire – NUNC

With the second research trip to Rome for *Homo Fatale* I shifted my focus on the Borgia's impact on society. The concrete facts and fables of their household, which I had researched in the first research trip, gradually lost their relevance to me as I could start to see a pattern. (This led to more widespread research in different archives in Rome and a stronger focus on the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana-library.)

During the interval between the two performances it struck me how my version differed from other narratives on the Borgia on one (essential) point: I presented them as a family who loved life, who had fun in plotting against the others. While most other creators present them as dark and bitter characters with perverse sexual preferences.

It seems as if the interpretation of Machiavelli has coloured the Borgia-presentation. This however, did not accord with what I found in Rome: I found a family that invested in parties and festivities – whether or not to lure their opponents. In this sense, I must agree with historian Gregovorius (1968, p.290) who said: "In him [Rodrigo] neither ambition nor the desire for power, which, in the majority of rulers, is the motive of their crimes, was the cause of his evil deeds. Nor was it hate of his fellows, nor cruelty, nor yet a vicious pleasure in doing evil. It was, however, his sensuality and also his love for his children—one of the noblest of human sentiments. … we have ever before us the cheerful, active man of the world."

Searching for the impact of the Borgia allowed me to see the world with or through their eyes, thus empathising, even identifying with the Borgia. I wanted to create characters that were loved for their wit, swiftness, strategic ingenuity and thus create picaresque heroes who tricked the others with flair and sensuality. With slapstick and mockery, the Borgia slalomed as glibly eels around their enemies.

Fig. 9: Archivum Secretum Vaticanum, Città dell' Vaticano

The reactions which had occurred involuntary, or at least to a greater degree than expected in Part I, would now – within Part II - be searched and further developed: What *happened* would now be created and exploited.

I am not the first one to re-create the Borgia (or any historical character) to speak out on issues and paradigms in my contemporary world. Shakespeare re-wrote the life of Richard III in order to meet the expectations of his time and Queen: "it was important for Shakespeare to present Richard as an evil man so as to justify Henry Tudor defeating him and becoming Henry VII. Shakespeare and the chroniclers needed to keep in favour with Queen Elizabeth I and show her Tudor dynasty as much better than Richard III's Plantagenet dynasty." (Globe, 2013)

History is a canvas for creators and directors to actualise past events and place them in concordance or continuity with another timeframe.

Fig. 10: The Borgia Trilogy - Part II, Homo Fatale © Bram Vandeveire – NUNC

My greatest fear when creating part II, was focussed on the equilibrium: how far could I go in reversing the villain with the hero? Would audiences still go along? How clownish could I present the Borgia (both in text and performing)?

This search for counter-examples, the reversal of *good* into a glorification of *bad* became a balancing act. What I searched was an idolatry for Rodrigo that allowed him to do the worst things without losing the empathy of the audience.

The critics mentioned the humour, the exaggerations, the moral disintegration. [9] "The story is packed with exaggerations, these hide the showdown of extreme and universal feelings of fear, love and emotions." (Stockman, 2012), "The unique idiom effortless links the vulgar with exaltation through a stream of historical information without losing any emotional subtleties. … Van Tourhout researched the Vatican archives and distilled a tragic chronicle of a dysfunctional family." (Coussens, 2012), "The interpretations of the Borgia transform the narrative into a universal play which does not depend on its historical correctness. Costuming and interpretation ensure a contemporary magnified mirror of power." (De Trazgenies, 2012)

Synopsis: Homo Fatale

Della Rovere and Charles have locked up the Borgia family in Castel Sant' Angelo. The performance starts with the birth of the incestuous child of Lucrezia and Rodrigo (the whole family is witnessing this event). The tension between the Borgia is rising; between Cesare and Rodrigo, between Vanozza and Rodrigo, between Cesare and Lucrezia, etc.

From the outside, it looks as if the Borgia are doomed, but Rodrigo seems to know what he is doing: he lets Della Rovere and Charles wait for months and months. Every day they meet but Rodrigo does what he does best: play. He consciously makes a fool of himself and never gives in to della Rovere and Charles. Instead Rodrigo tries to drive a wedge between the two of them.
The moment Rodrigo knows that Charles is unhappy with his current queen, the bond between Charles and della Rovere seems broken. Rodrigo promises Charles a new queen and Naples if he releases the Borgia. Charles, already discouraged, immediately gives in. Della Rovere is once again defeated.

[9] Originally written in Dutch, my translations.

From the moment they are free, Rodrigo starts plotting again. Lucrezia must marry Alfonso di Aragon, Cesare must be cooled down and a big party should be given to all Romans to celebrate the liberation of the French oppressors. Alfonso is welcomed and all but Cesare are impressed with the new groom.

Meanwhile Charles loses the battle in Naples and realises he has been tricked by Rodrigo. When he returns to Rome to complain, Rodrigo fools Charles once again claiming that -for his own safety- he should take Cesare with him to France. Charles is lost for words and accepts everything Rodrigo demands; Charles had tried to play a role in the world history but failed and is saddened (Rodrigo mocks him). He asks Charles to seek a partner for Cesare, hoping that he will then forget Lucrezia.
Cesare is not as easily fooled and knows that Rodrigo wants him out of the way. Especially when he sees how Lucrezia grows fond of her second husband, Alfonso. But Cesare must give in to his father, he is after all the pope, and full of bitterness Cesare leaves Rome.

Rodrigo feels free: Cesare out of the way, Lucrezia in love and soon to be pregnant, Vanozza has forgiven him. Everything seems at ease and prosperous.

But in France Cesare is not treated with the respect he believes he deserves, instead they treat him as a bastard of a pope and it is only after a series of embarrassing meetings Cesare reaches an agreement with Charlotte d'Albrêt.

Fig. 11: The Borgia Trilogy, Rehearsal 2012
© Benjamin Van Tourhout

Meanwhile - in Rome - due to the pregnancy of Lucrezia, Rodrigo finally sees his dynastic dream fulfilled. Vanozza, on the other hand, is distancing herself more and more as della Rovere tries to seduce her. He tries to lure her with memories of their past, their youth, their love. Vanozza is not as assured as Rodrigo is, therefore she tries to look for future safe ways.

Rodrigo acknowledges this distance and tries to close the emotional gap between them, but does not succeed. Rodrigo fears trouble is coming and tries to outwit the others, but a birth has its own timing. Rodrigo has to wait and this makes him uncomfortable, as he knows that standing still is going backwards.

During the wedding party of Lucrezia and Giovanni, Cesare returns with his new wife, Charlotte d'Albrêt. The Borgia clan takes revenge for Cesare's former missteps and mocks him with his second-hand choice. Charlotte, on the other hand, is not really impressed with the brutal Borgia and defends her new husband.

Rodrigo warns Cesare: Lucrezia must be left alone, especially since she is pregnant. Cesare is shocked and without hesitation he kills Alfonso and beats the unborn child out of Lucrezia. Even Rodrigo is shocked at such a level of aggression. Is this what he created?

2014-2016: Homo Solo & The Borgia trilogy

The last part of the Trilogy (Homo Solo) was never intended as a separate part, therefore it was immediately integrated in the concept of the Trilogy itself.

Fig. 12: Segretario di Stato, Città dell' Vaticano

I rewrote Part I and II completely so that it would feel as if they were one fluent whole with atmospheric motives, mirroring scenes, etc. (e.g. the midpoint of the trilogy was the break up between father and soon).

Part I had led the way to empathy with the Borgia. Part II searched if and how the historical characters could speak out on today and thus, maximizing the empathy for Rodrigo and with Part III we wanted to search what fiction could do with empathy, history and in this case: the complicity of audiences.

The last research trip in Rome, focussed on the last months, the legacy of the Borgia-reign and the different opinions on their passage through the Vatican. That I got access to yet another Vatican-archive was a (godly) gift; I could research and discuss with Johan Ickx the *Segretario di Stato* of the Vatican. This archive not so much focusses on the personal letters or the religious impact but –as the name implies – on the state affairs of the

Vatican. This was a refreshing viewpoint on the Borgia and helped me in gradually creating a distance between myself and the characters.
I wanted to respond to the audience and not in a way one more or less could expect: the catharsis.
Instead of searching for a way out, guilt or punishment I choose to boomerang the empathy audiences had built up in the first two parts.

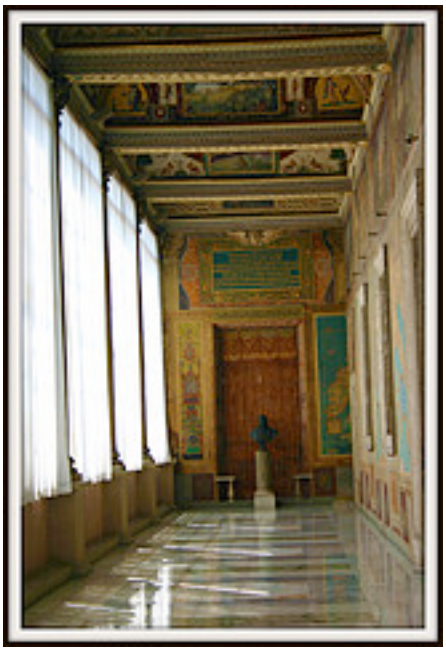


Fig. 13: Segretario di Stato, Città dell' Vaticano © Benjamin Van Tourhout

From the very beginning I knew that form, music, set, costumes, language, etc. all needed to be totally different in part III. I wanted a shock effect, a Verfremdungs-effect, which focussed as much on the resolution of the narrative as on the empathy.

I chose to abandon chronology and tried to think: what if 10.000 years have passed since the end of part II? What if the Borgia family meets for the first and last time since their passage in the Vatican in 1503?
What would they do? What would they say?
Would they forgive each other, be at ease, show respect?

With this concept in my head, I went to Rome for the last time. I was already saying goodbye to the characters that had shaped my life for more than seven years. I knew them inside out, because they were my creations and not as much historical characters anymore.

I did not want to avoid the questions of guilt, on the contrary, these would be central but they would no longer remain safely hidden behind the fourth theatrical wall. Fiction would leave its safe haven and try to use ethics, empathy and Verfremdung.

I had four different goals with part III:
-finalizing the narrative itself,
-discuss the ambiguous empathy audiences had developed,
-change the atmosphere of the performance on all levels,
-reach out beyond expectations and the safety of fiction.
Seen from the characters' point of view I wanted to install an awareness of their behaviour but not in a moral or ethical way.

The one and only *fault* that occurred in Rodrigo's opinion would be the practical failure, a miscalculation. As he saw himself and his family not as *wrong* in the moral sense; they were heroes who had dared to go where the audience would flinch. They wanted to go down the drain, but only if audiences went along.
The characters would question audiences on why they had laughed with their "jokes of murder and blood", on the entertaining value of nepotism, murders and rape. This was combined and amplified due to the live Rock music of Brent Vanneste.

This was a risk, audiences could – rightfully - feel tricked or wrongly accused, as the characters no longer played by the rules installed in the earlier two parts. Because of that, audiences could denounce this rupture and shift towards the *new* way of performing. Are audiences to be blamed for being there? Is it their function or job to oppose and rebel to what they see? Was their empathy nothing more than engagement in the narrative? I assume, Brecht would have loved these questions, just as we did.

I chose a documentary way of performing (both in form and text-structure), therefore we deconstructed the chronology, the identification of the actors and the language idiom. An atmosphere as if in a sort of interview or tribunal was constructed. Gradually a piece in a piece developed itself as the performers spoke, acted *as* themselves and *as* the characters. This overlap is not new, but in the context of this performance it felt once again fresh and effective. This effect was amplified, I hope, because of a Rock 'n Roll band stood in the centre of the stage and could be seen as the referee between the characters.

That the contemporary world was essential became clear when the characters wrote names of - what I consider to be - contemporary Borgia's: Leopold II, Stalin, the CEO of Black Water, Idi Amin, Khadafy, Assad, etc. They are, as the Borgia, able to empathise with the fate and/or pain of others but in the end, choose not to be guided by such sentiments because it conflicts with their own interests. Therefore, the term *pathologic narcissists*; as they will always - no matter the cost for others - choose for themselves.

Fig. 14: The Borgia Trilogy - Part III, Homo Solo
© Eva Vlonck

When della Rovere asked the audience if they had fun, if they wanted to be as the Borgia, the audience was dead silent, some were shocked, some had to admit that they indeed had empathised with the devil.
But then came the real Borgia trick as the brutal rupture between Part I, II and III was not the endpoint of the empathic experiment.
I wanted audience to close their eyes once again, I wanted to search a way that they knowingly forgot what Rodrigo had done, that they once again, even after the rupture, empathised.

Therefore, I came up with the *devils' devil* and chose for Cesare Borgia who - together with della Rovere - poisoned his father. Together with the performers I searched ways for an immense and profound grief at such betrayal. Because of the tears, the loneliness of Rodrigo and the emotional disillusion, audiences once again forgot who was crying, once again forgot what they knew. Audiences rooted for Rodrigo through their emotional connection, and were lured through empathy, emotional transportation and perhaps even identification.


Fig. 15: The Borgia Trilogy - Part III,
Homo Solo © Bram Vandeveire – NUNC

And then the Borgia could leave the stage, they had made their point. They had infected audiences with ambiguous empathy and they had become, to say the least, hybrid heroes.

Synopsis: Homo Solo

White lights.

Rodrigo, Vanozza, Cesare, Lucrezia and della Rovere step on the stage and connect their microphones, they check whether all cables are connected. Meanwhile a rock 'n roll band plays noise-music. They are for the first time in the trilogy dressed in historical costumes.
The characters introduce themselves by stating their names. Cesare immediately admits he killed his father, which makes Lucrezia mad.
Rodrigo is flabbergasted, he still cannot believe his son really killed him, he asks the audience if they saw that coming.

Lucrezia believes is time go home, she feels she has worked enough for the Borgia and the audience. It is time to clear the stage.
Della Rovere refuses Lucrezia to go as he wants to tell the audience of the cruel death of Rodrigo. Rodrigo is furious that della Rovere gives away the end: this is the ultimate proof that della Rovere is a brainless loser.

Lucrezia asks della Rovere if he is happy and della Rovere remembers his younger days with Vanozza, their love and passion. It is here that Vanozza believes that the hate and anger between della Rovere and Rodrigo initially comes from them, it is because of her. Lucrezia thinks that her mother is flattering herself too much.

Cesare believes he is innocent, as his father was no longer able to hold the line, to save the Borgia family he had to take responsibility and search for ways the Borgia could hold power in the Vatican, in Rome. Cesare sees prove in the weakness of Rodrigo as he recalls how emotional his father was when Lucrezia left for Ferrara.

This moment is remembered by all of the Borgia, they go back in time and re-live this breaking point:
-Rodrigo respects Lucrezia for never giving him away as her rapist, he loves her more than anything and fears that with her leaving, his powers are leaving him too.
-Cesare sees his broken father and decides that if the Borgia clan is to survive, he must take over.
-Vanozza sees how Rodrigo breaks and how Cesare smiles at that sight. She knows she must prepare herself for a transition.
-Lucrezia cries as she arrives in Ferrara where she is treated as a whore. She is left ignorant of all the mayhem happening in Rome. She does not know how Cesare and della Rovere make plans to poison Rodrigo, she does not know how Rodrigo says goodbye to Vanozza.

Lucrezia feels like an orphan: she always wanted to go away, but now that she is separated from the Borgia she feels lonelier than ever.

Cesare cuts of these remembrances and enters the room where Rodrigo awaits him. Cesare is trembling but Rodrigo calms him. He knows he will kill him anyway.
Cesare asks if Rodrigo loves him as much as he has loved Lucrezia.
Rodrigo answers that Cesare is exactly what Rodrigo is, so how could he loves such a monster?

Cesare kisses his father for the last time and poisons him with a Judas kiss, Rodrigo slowly dies while forgiving his son.

Della Rovere gloats and kills Cesare who forgot that della Rovere always had a trick upon his sleeve. Rodrigo is disappointed in both Cesare and della Rovere.

Della Rovere is chosen as the new pope, Julius II, and Rodrigo says his goodbyes to the audience and to della Rovere, he recommends everybody never to be afraid.

I loved life.
Once.
And now,
I am nothing more than a story.
Forgotten in golden watches.
I hope you will be happy.
Take hold of your dreams.
Find something that
makes life worthwhile.
After all those years of shining,
I am on my way to be forgotten.
I made my life a rich as
a creamy sauce.
And I succeeded, I think.
There were good things.
There was love.
There was happiness.
Hidden somewhere deep down.
But it was here.
I wish you all a goodnight.
And a good life.
Rovere?
The last word is yours.
Don't be afraid.[10]

Fig. 16: The Borgia Trilogy – Part III, Homo Solo
© Benjamin Van Tourhout

I am often asked why I invest so much time in researching archives, libraries and go to the actual places if I - in the end - rewrite my findings to such a degree that the whole text is fiction that is at its most *inspired* by true facts. The reason is quite simple, I would not have been inspired to rewrite, reinvent if I had not been there, if I had not researched. Carlyle (1894 [1842]) said on physical research: "No theory, by what professor so ever, can be of any use to me in comparison (with real contact) … It blazes strangely in my thoughts; these are the very jawbones, that were clenched together in deathly rage, on this very ground … it brings the matter home to one, with a

[10] Final monologue from The Borgia Trilogy, Homo Solo.

strange veracity, - as if for the first time one saw it to be no fable and theory but a dire fact. I will beg for a tooth and a bullet; authenticated by your own eyes and word of honour!" (Thomas Carlyle, 24 September 1842 in a letter to Edward Fitzgerald)

Fig. 17: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana,
Città dell' Vaticano © Benjamin Van Tourhout

Let me close this chapter with a threshold: The doormat of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, a threshold I crossed so many times.

I was inspired by the sounds, the movements of the librarians, the smell of the parchments and the wooden tables.
Being there is essential to be inspired, as I need to learn, indulge in the information before I can throw it all away and create.

1.2. Chapter 2: Fictional heroes and the arts

"[heroes are there] To inspire, to challenge,
to light fires for (and under) people of whatever age
who need to be reminded that there is more to their lives then they are taught to.
(*Herr mit den Helden*, Neiman, S.)

"You either die a hero or you live long enough to see yourself become the villain."
(Batman: The Dark Knight, Harvey Dent)

"Heroes are necessary in order to enable citizens to find their own ideals, courage, and wisdom in the society.''
(*The cry for Myth*, Rollo May).

"He is not extraordinary in virtue"
yet "does not fall into bad fortune because of evil and wickedness"
(*Poetic*s, Aristotle)

"It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse."
(*The Hero with a Thousand faces*, Campbell)

1.2.1. The origins?

Fictional heroes are a complex species, they have different goals, features and because of that attract (or are denounced by) different audiences. There is no such a thing as *the* hero. Yet, there are some basic features that are commonly connected with heroism (nobleness, altruism, sacrificing oneself, etc.) but without much effort one finds heroic characters that are not as easily labelled.

Despite the ongoing popularity of heroes, one does not need to dig deep to discover ambiguous heroes with - to say the least - questionable characteristics and motives to act. It is fascinating that this ancient species survives, despite its ambiguity and the subsequent layered reactions by audiences.

It is believed that narratives emerged because humans were searching for an explanation, meaning and perspective but also from the need to *play* and thus to engage and empathise in fictional worlds. "Myths appear to explain the workings of the cosmos and catastrophic events" according to influential archaeologist Lewis-Williams (2002, p. 290) while performance theorist Schechner sees different motivations for narratives and ritualising: "Rituals are used to manage potential conflicts regarding status, power, space, resources and sex. Performing rituals helps people get through difficult periods of transition and move from one life to another. Ritual is also a way for people to connect to a collective, to remember or construct a muthis past, to build social solidarity, and to form or maintain a community." (2006, p. 87) Historian Huizinga (1950) therefore, defined humans as the *Homo Ludens* while linguist Boyd stated that the human capacity to see, create and thus play with patterns is essential in the creation and reception of art as it is a "kind of cognitive *play*, the set of activities designed to engage human *attention* through their own appeal to our preference for inferentially rich and therefore *patterned* information." (2009, p. 85)

Ancient narratives established a relation between humans and the Gods who are supposed to be in charge on meta-levels. Those Gods provided both shelter and punishment and answered the unknown. The fictional narratives that arose, comforted the communities who invented them, in other words, their own fables and myths became honoured and offered solace – a comforting loop.
Thereafter the need for proximity between man and gods grew, therefore heroes emerged as half-gods, thus being both godlike and humanlike. Such early heroes still had some godly stardust but already resembled humans; they formed the bridge between gods and mortals. This growing proximity became a goldmine for authors and a conglomerate of heroes soon emerged.
The myths developed into a variety of heroic narratives, the title of Campbell's influential book *The Hero with a Thousand faces* (third ed.: 2008) seems truer than ever. Mythologist Campbell suggests that the first set of heroes were warriors who became admired and served as a role model for their communities (p. 123, 337). Overtime the hero and his characteristics have transformed into different *faces*, hence Campbell's title.

The multitude of heroic *faces* seems endless and shows how heroes evolved overtime into the hero as athlete, the tragic hero, the comic hero, the hero as leader, the hero as loner, the hero as underdog, the hero as adventurer, the hero as saviour, the hero as exemplary, inspirational leader, etc.

Overtime heroic narratives have been considered as beneficial, then again as harmful, didactic or untrustworthy; depending on the time and context narratives were en vogue or not. This fluent process still goes on today, as

philosopher Lyotard (1984) claimed that narratives had lost their ideological impact and thus fictional heroes and their narratives were put under postmodernist pressure. I will claim that such Post Modern concepts themselves became under pressure since 9/11 which, in itself, instigated a re-valorisation of heroic narratives and propose a Heroic cycle based on the rapport between society's distress and the emergence of heroes (See also: Chapter 5).

Heroes can be seen as a special brand of prostitutes, because they adapt to every climate, change their face and name in order to lure, seduce and answer every wish and need from audiences. They do not care how they look as long as they have impact and followers. They play with their *customers* and are always in charge.

The origin of heroes: heroes and anti-heroes?

According to archaeologist Hansen (2013), the first use of the hero-concept took "place during an especially dynamic period in prehistory, the second half of the 4th millennium BC." that is the period when humans evolved into sedentary ways of living and needed to defend their territories, search food and shelter for their communities. Hansen sees a series of inventions as e.g. the wheel, the wagon, new weapons and most importantly the "enormous changes in social conditions" as the trigger for the emergence of the concept of the hero.

Just like Campbell, Hansen claims that heroes who could safeguard and nourish their group were needed and respected (with basic features as strength, endurance, sacrifice for the community, fighting skills, etc.).
This first type of hero became known as the war-hero; the one who keeps his or her community safe, who serves and protects. This serving and protecting idea of heroism still stands today, although the *own* community is prevalent over others. ("To Protect and to Serve" is, since 1955, the motto of the Los Angeles Police Department.)
This means that most heroes focus on their communities despite the effects (or collateral damage) on others.
Even until today this classic war-hero overshadows other heroic types as he or she is used on a much broader scale than any other type. The fact that we are willing to accept and honour heroes has, according to psychologist Messick (2004) to do with reciprocity, or "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.". Such loyalty is not an obligation but a gratitude "towards those who have shielded us from harm." Thus, it seems that heroes must

earn their status and if they have provided aid to their communities, they will be rewarded with loyalty (this loyalty is under continued pressure and explains why heroes must live up to expectations and must always live at their maximum capacity).
Next to the hero his antithesis emerged, known as the *anti-hero*; although the term is often considered to be rather recent it actually dates back to Greek Theatre and to characters as Don Quixote by de Cervantes. As said in the glossary, I prefer to use the term *flawed hero*, as it combines different definitions and descriptions (the tragic hero, the anti-hero, the underdog etc.). See for a genealogy of the anti-hero, Kadiroğlu (2012). [11] (See also: Wilson & Furst (1976), Brombert (1999), Cartlidge (2012), Grantham (2015).)
Today the heroic label is no longer limited to kings, knights or fantastic creature as the democratisation and deconstruction of heroism, since Realism, has led to changes in both the features and appearance of heroes; the vulnerability and flaws of heroes, the blurred line between hero, anti-hero or villain give heroes contemporary faces.

Because of all these different heroic faces, every member of the audience can develop a personal rapport with heroes - even those who decline heroes at all. Because it seems almost impossible to ignore heroism in today's world - one wonders if it ever was -, both saturation and truthfulness can be elements to decline heroes and their narratives. Next to that heroes could be considered as ancient relics who search supremacy over others and are shallow and un-nuanced.

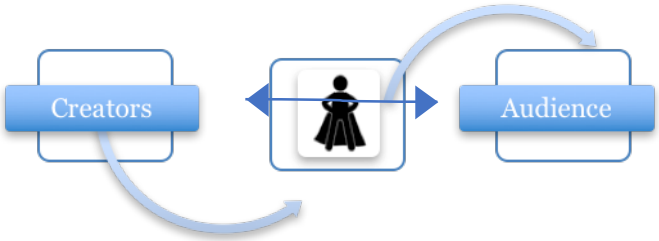
Using Heroism?
Not only what the hero does or believes fuels the debate on what or who is heroic. The discussion is complicated due to what audiences themselves consider to be a hero: a role model, an exemplary leader, an inspirational or soothing character, a soulmate, an entertainer, etc.
In my opinion, heroes can hold all mentioned labels but not vice versa: a leader is not necessarily a hero nor is a role model necessarily as inspiring as heroes are believed to be.
To shed some helping light on the matter psychologist Kinsella et al. (2015) researched lay concepts on heroism. They found out that labels as *goodness*, *inspiring*, *saving others* seem to be quite exclusive for heroes: "Heroes remind them [the participants] about the human capacity for exceptionality and goodness" as they were "rated as more courageous than role models, … rated higher on self-sacrificing and saving others than leaders or role models. … Leaders were rated as the most powerful". Kinsella et al. thus found out that although heroes do possess central features (as being brave,

[11] Source: Kadiroğlu (2012) http://dtcfdergisi.ankara.edu.tr/index.php/dtcf/article/view/700

showing moral integrity) they are not necessarily considered to be powerful; this brings us to characters as the underdog or the whistle-blower.

This lack of power by heroes does not need to be a disadvantage since contrary to what one might think, this can be turned into a tool to attract audiences. The rise and struggle of the underdog, the efforts and the empathic rapport (through similarity and involvement) that go with it form tools to tighten the bond with audiences. Fictional heroes prove to be resourceful in bending the rules to reverse downsides into advantages.

The figure of the hero is the middleman and lubricant between the creators'



search for empathy and the acceptance of empathy by audiences. Therefore, heroes are a tool used by creators to create a rapport with audiences. In this sense, the hero stands literally in the centre of it all, on both meta as micro levels (being a dramatic or entertaining character and/or a tool to inflict inspiration or moralities). Since the hero is used by so many different creators, consumed by so many different audiences, this, almost naturally, leads to a wide range of clear-cut and ambiguous heroic characters.

Campbell spoke of heroes as having many faces, due to the sheer number of heroic narratives and faces we could as easily say they have no face at all. Because fictional heroes are mouldable to every shape, size and content their impact on audiences is not necessarily limited to a beneficial one just because of the thousand faces, or the faceless-ness of heroes. Heroic faces do not only come in huge quantities, they also change constantly.

Aristotle claimed that the (tragic) fate of fictional heroes had impact on their audiences and that such narratives could render catharsis. Fate is the one element fictional heroes are not responsible for within narratives and this connects them with their audiences. Fate is the playground of creators who can develop a fate that challenges the hero and gives the opportunity to presents its features and characteristics.

Aristotle saw tragedies as a mean for audiences to cleanse their personal fears while engaging themselves with the tragic play they experience. (This idea has, since Aristotle, been widened and it is often seen as the process of sharing emotions between spectator and fictional character which would lead to: moral and intellectual lessons, developing empathy for others and to personal emotional relief).

I wondered if that concept of soothing and exemplary fictional heroes still was in play in contemporary times. Not only because I use heroes and play with heroic features in my work but moreover if that work and that of others had some impact beyond instant affect and/or entertainment: Are fictional heroes still moral beacons? Does the concept of exemplary leader still (or once again) have a role in modern fiction?

This led to a follow-up question: Is there a contemporary heroic model to be found?
These questions were important during the research and they led to a contemporary heroic model: the hybrid hero.

Within my work I use the fictional hero as a dodgy guide who takes audiences by the hand. By doing so, this fictional hero can deceive audiences, due to his classic aura of altruism. I have always preferred those protagonists who choose to get their hands dirty, those who had questionable goals but asked no questions when it came down to achieving these goals.

In my opinion, we can use the fictional hero on three basic levels because the hero can:
a) be a moral or inspiring example - who despite the challenges does the *right* thing,
b) behave parallel or similar to the audience - the hero experiences similar events as its audience, and
c) be an exciting character that entertains audiences.

These three basic levels connect with three possible goals of creators:
a) to inflict morality and to inspire,
b) to inflict empathy, and
c) to render entertainment and affect.

Within my work the combination of these three tools has led to heroes who - to say the least - challenge common (lay) concepts on the *goodness* and beneficial impact of heroic narratives. No matter the form or the ambiguity of these fictional heroes (Rodrigo Borgia, Gilles de Rais, etc.), their raison d'être is the empathy he or she can evoke within the audience. Because I try

to get under the skin of audiences and want them to accept these fictional characters and identify with them, it is not so much my purpose to cleanse audiences but to allow them to *copy* the moral tunnels of such ambiguous characters. To think *as* the heroes (to become someone else) and to, ultimately, adopt moralities they would not empathise with outside the fictional world.
Therefore, I consider fiction as a mean to create contexts whereby the hero can lure and seduce audiences into accepting what they would normally condemn.

This is (in a nutshell) why I became interested in the subject of the hero as a dramatic character; not so much to present the exemplary behaviour but to see how ambiguous moralities and non-exemplary behaviour has the power to lure and inspire audiences.
It was only during the research I gradually developed what I have now defined as the hybrid hero.

Next to that, I believe that this function of narratives - to feel and think *as* someone else and therefore adopt or change beliefs - is the essence of fiction. (Transportation has been defined as a "mechanism whereby narratives may exert their power to change beliefs" and a "psychological mechanism through which narrative communication can affect beliefs", Green et. al. (2000, 2012).
In this light, I propose that the catharsis of Aristotle is not only there to blow off emotional steam but can also be a temporal *relieve* of oneself during the experience of narratives. In other words, the willingness to take part in the lives of others, to empathise, to adopt other viewpoints could be the quintessence of why audiences engage in storytelling.

The relation between heroes and empathy is a stronghold, both in and out of the story:
In the story because heroes generally empathise (feel *as* the other or take the perspective of the other) with something or someone to start their heroic route.
Out of the story as the connection between audience and hero pushes itself into reality onto the reader, the audience. (See also: Empathic line)

1.2.2. Accepting or denouncing heroes?

Basic attitudes towards heroes can roughly be divided between adoration and contempt – heroes seem to inflict polarisation (which will be an asset when developing hybrid heroes).

As heroes are loved and hated they serve as catalyst for endless debates on their empathic impact, characteristics, virtues and vices, truthfulness, etc. and thus on their usability in (changing) societies.

Not only *how* heroes act but also their function in narratives and the values they proclaim (e.g. as exemplary leader) have been discussed overtime. The idea that heroes can lead the way has gradually been considered as naïve, however in recent times (post 9/11), a renewed interest for heroes grew as the pendulum is shifting once again.

Accepting heroes

Since the turn of the millennium our world has been in transition, many suggest the attacks on 9/11 were the turning point. This together with a series of crises; the financial crisis, the ecological crisis leading to an ideological crisis. It seems that politicians are only partially able to provide shelter, which in its turn facilitates the rise of populism all over the world.

We saw a growing interest for heroes in the academic field and a renewed interest within the arts. This is, in my opinion, no coincidence as audiences turn to other *institutions* when political, religious leaders or CEO's no longer provide comforting and consoling answers nor enrich our lives with added value. Narratives can, I believe, partially provide that *sense of purpose* hence the revival of heroes since 9/11.

Since heroes are essential and pivotal figures delivering ideology and morality wrapped in (gripping) narratives it seems logic that heroes are back on the foreground. The hero is both new and old; therefore, heroes combine nostalgia with utopian ideas (because of that it should not surprise us that politicians use and play with heroism in their campaigns). (See also: Hassler-Forest, 2011, Leggat, 2015)

Heroes are bound to their time of creation and yet are timeless as subject. They embody recurring elements as nobleness, sacrificing, transformation but nevertheless are constantly swapping *faces* which leads to a constant renewal of heroes.

I see three waves that fuel todays renewed interest for heroes: the idea of a makeable world, the velocity of everyday life and the growing nostalgia towards a *simpler* life. (See also: The expected return of the hero)

Denouncing heroes

Fictional heroes are denounced for two major reasons, either they are considered as opium for the masses or their behaviour itself is discussed.

Simply stated: Heroes are denounced because they are either too *clean* or too *mean*.

Those who choose to ignore the hero as a character do that mostly based upon the stereotypical image of classic heroes as e.g. Superman, instead of looking at the conglomerate of ambivalent and paradoxical features heroes can hold (as e.g. Odysseus)
(I believe that the gap between Superman and other flawless heroes and the audience is often too wide and therefore fails to attract the suspension of disbelief.)

Those who, on the other hand, denounce heroes based on their behaviour, focus on the problematic actions or morality of heroes. Heroes do things wrong and wrong things while pursuing their goal and this pursuit and tunnel vision can lead to an alienation.

Audiences, based on their own background and moral frameworks, *read* the specific heroes and their heroic situations. This will lead to labelling some characters as heroic and others as exactly the opposite. Political and economic psychologists Jayawickreme and Di Stefano (2012) explain this attribution: "For more liberal, individualizing communities, valued forms of heroes would involve defending rights and bucking oppressive social norms (for example, Rosa Parks), while communities that emphasise binding moralities would value heroes who remained loyal to - and defended - the community's integrity."


Fig. 18: Twee Kweenen (Two Queens) Rehearsal 2010 © Benjamin Van Tourhout

In attributing heroism, both the rebellious proposal of the fictional hero and the personal wish of the audience are two elements that, if combined, can lead to attraction.

1.2.3. A hero of our times? The temporality of heroes

"I was modest--they accused me of being crafty:
I became secretive.
I felt deeply good and evil--nobody caressed me, everybody offended me:
I became rancorous.
I was gloomy--other children were merry and talkative.
I felt myself superior to them--but was considered inferior:
I became envious.
I was ready to love the whole world--none understood me: and I learned to hate."
(*A Hero of Our Time*, Mikhail Lermontov)

Heroes have been essential in every culture and continent, from the Yoruba to the Greeks, from the Aboriginal over the Japanese culture. Although the concept of the hero may have many *faces*, its basic concept (a figure with augmented characteristics and/or features who influences contexts) is omnipresent. Since heroes are created in a certain space and time context, it is the contemporary interpretation that leaves us with heroes from *our* times.

A fictional hero is a temporal phenomenon on two levels: the (internal) duration in the narrative and the duration of (external) impact within audiences. [12] Heroes' effects are happening *now* (whenever audiences encounter them) but their post-impact and possible re-emergences are essential to create a heroic legacy.
This heroic relevance and expiration date relates to the (empathic) rapport between audiences and context (e.g.: similarities, dramatic elements, moral frameworks, moods in society etc.).

There are times when heroes seem to be accessories or beacons for audiences; this intertwining rapport is fluid but decisive in the process of heroic creations and reception. Since creators are in search for impact they choose those figures that seem appropriate and fit for a certain time and spatial context. (According to Media scientist Treat (2009) "It seems hardly coincidental that superheroes flourish during traumatizing wars abroad and an economic crisis inherited from Gilded Age corporate corruption at home.")
The relation between fiction and reality, is in my opinion, crystallised twice in the figure of the hero. One the one hand, the empathic relation between

[12] This process of fading in and out was the subject of the conference (Das Erscheinen und Verschwinden von Helden - The Fading of the Hero) that was set up between Luca, School of Arts and the Universities of Leuven and Freiburg in 2016.

audience and narrative and on the other, the narrative occurred because of an empathy towards events in the political/economical/sociological reality.

It seems that for every situation and time there is a different type of hero with different characteristics (as there were once gods for every ailment or for imploring weather conditions). As times are changing, so does the hero within narratives. They need to be up-to-date to attract audiences but also need to hold universal ideas that can transcend their time and context. This explains why some heroic narratives hold their appeal overtime and other remain strictly related to their context. Creating universally appealing heroes seems to be the crux.

The hero can serve as an inspiring catalyst or in Brecht's more sinister words: "Unglücklich das Land, das Helden nötig hat." 1948)
This leads to questions on creatorship: should creators give audiences *what they want* or what they think audiences *need*? Should creators lead the way, propose and try-out proposals? Are creators there to answer the call of audiences?

Creations do not exist in a vacuum; this, in my opinion, does not mean that creators are only there to *answer* questions raised by their audiences, or to respond solely to phenomena in society. Although critic Stephanie Zacharek (2016) in her *Time*-review on *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* asks creators to do just that: "Why, oh why, can't we just get what we came for? That is, a good meat-and-potatoes showdown between a brooding vigilante in a pointy-eared mask … and a simpler, sunnier protector of humankind".
The hero in this case, is seen both by both creators and audience as a tool: as someone who generates enjoyment and morality. The hero is seen as an instrument, a tool to generate impact.

Social scientists Boudreau and de Alba (2011) provided us with a concrete set of changing faces, as they saw three recent (1980s till 2010s) types of heroes:
a) the anti-heroic cynicism of the 1980s and 1990s,
b) the transitory hopeful heroic period of the turn of the millennium,
and c) the uncertain "post-heroic" period.

Thus, in the course of only 30 years the heroic face has radically transformed and evolved. This development seems to be a key element when looking at heroes; they are not only ambiguous, with fluid characteristics but furthermore seem to be *slippery* to define or contain them.

Heroes have been declared *death* over and over but seem as resilient as cockroaches after a nuclear bomb. Post-Modernist Lyotard (1984) spoke of the defeat of meta-narrative or arches while anthropologist Porpora (1996) believed that heroes were literally old school, as his respondents mostly spoke of heroes prior the 20th century; "the data display a striking ahistoricity in hero choice. Of the 162 different heroes mentioned, only 10 lived prior to the 20th century: Jesus, Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Bach, the virgin Mary, Columbus, Saint Paul, Saint Francis Xavier, and Socrates." Once again this shows how fast heroism can fade in or fade out, as in recent times the hero as subject seems to be omnipresent. While Porpora saw that history and its figures became forgotten and lost their appeal to identify with, philosopher Taylor (1952) predicted this failure of meta-narratives and linked this with the bourgeois culture where the need for personal heroes became absent (once again, the connection between reality and fiction is mentioned.) These three theses not only emphasise the changing nature of heroes but furthermore their changing rapport with audiences, while Boudreau and de Alba see constant change, Porpora sees heroes as old school and Taylor as bourgeois. I believe, all three of them can be considered correct at the same time. We could paraphrase de Maistre by stating that creators *develop those heroes that audiences deserve* within a specific time and spatial context.

Linguist Jewers sees the myriad rebirths of fictional heroes as "glamorized archetypal plots that reflect the hopes, fears, and material aspirations of respective contemporary cultures, and how they both assimilate and aestheticize violence". Also, according to Jewers (2000, p. 39, 59) the "Moral, linguistic, and cultural codes evolve, but if the tenor alters, the vehicle remains recognizably the same." Jewers seems to conclude that narratives are only able to change in formal ways, that the narratives themselves do not change. Recent changes in both the development of heroism and different media platforms showed that narratives do change both in content and form. The challenges binge-watching pose for creators is a recent but profound one, the same can be said of the development of hybrid heroes.

The pendulum and appeal of Heroes

The context in which a hero emerges plays an important role, whether a nation is at war, natural disaster struck, etc. Local customs and traditions also play their part in attributing heroism. African Historian, Falola (1997) found that even materialism, which is, in most cases considered as superficial, could become a heroic symbol. Showing off as a symbol for heroism may sound odd to many but "wealth can in fact purchase honor and glory. Cars, titles, mansions, and lavish parties are the outward symbols of what matters, … Traditional elements of status, for instance, wealth and titles, are combined with new ones such as a taste for foreign imports, vacations abroad, and expensive cars and mansions to define success. Not

all successful persons are heroes, but the heroes appropriate all the criteria of success and legitimate them."
Another example of how heroes are perceived in different contexts can be found in the *We Don't Need Another Hero* research by sociologists Yair et al. (2014) where the opinions on heroism of Israeli and German students have been compared. The Israeli students concur in saying that each group has its own heroes, and that role models depend on specific times and situations. As one student said, "There is no global hero, agreed by the world over. There will always be those who oppose him." Furthermore, they suggested that "whenever you are in a specific life stage you are exposed to someone who you look up to as a hero." Thus, not only was the time and space context mentioned but also the individual age of a person. This partially explains the different heroic attributions and different genres but also the differences in treating heroes in narratives for children or adults as morality, behaviour, splendour etc.
Although most of us admire heroes and (secretly) want to achieve the heroic status, we must acknowledge the fact that heroes are a minority-group with a (believed) maximum impact on others. Both the wish to do *good* and to become *known* are two incentives to become heroic. Because heroes are widely perceived as exemplary role models, large parts of the audience want to achieve such a heroic status. This duality between fame and morality can also be seen within narratives and provides us with vain heroes as Tony Stark (Superhero by Marvel) or Achilles. Both acknowledge their value and seem to use it as leverage, their vanity can be seen as an asset (they do not want to disappoint) and as recognisable humanlike characteristic that attracts empathy.

This brings me to conclude that not only the actions, the moral ideals, the context in which they emerge but also the perception and the subsequent status of heroes leads to more or less appeal. Since there are so many variables it should not surprise that both the creation and reception of heroes is fluid and ever-changing. Variables for accepting/denouncing heroes, and therefore elements creators must take into account include heroic actions, thoughts, beliefs, moral principles, altruism, steadfastness, guarding the community, the context and circumstances in which heroes operate, his or her relationships with others, the time and spatial context, etc.

1.2.4. The expected return of the hero? [13]

Our fantasy of a hero is that he's the good guy
who is going to shut down the bad guy.
That has got to change if we want to deal with the crisis that we're in.
There is no bad guy.
We are all to blame.
(on directing *Wonder Woman, 2017,* Patty Jenkins)

The contemporary boom of heroic narratives (especially in TV-series and movies) reveals the correlation between a society and its created heroes. In times of crises and transformation mankind is anxiously searching for clear answers and a way out. This could partially explain the rise of demagogues all over the world but furthermore why contemporary heroic *faces* are once again finding their way to audiences.

In today's world, I see three elements that influence the creation and re-appearance of the contemporary heroes:
-The perceived velocity of life,
-The perceived make-ability of life,
-The world in transition leading to nostalgia.

These elements are strictly spoken neither artistic nor philosophical; they emerge from the belly of society but have a profound impact on the high and popular arts and their ethical concepts. Next to that they form the perfect humus to create heroes that console, sooth, deliver escapism, give meaning, ask critical questions etc.

Velocity:
Social media-platforms led to a shift in contemporary life. The technological possibilities and world-wide connectivity created a non-stop stream of mass-information. These media streams made the world *turn* faster and changed the way we present ourselves to our (virtual) friends. Some of us struggle to cope with these platforms, its usage and its ever-growing butterfly-effects. The seemingly never-ending stream of stories coming from all different forms of media-platforms, the choices on how to sift and respond to those messages leave many of us drained and unsatisfied.

This perception of *velocity* is not a novelty; in 1713 doctor Ramazzini already researched and described "Diseases of Workers" when investigating working circumstances, levels of stress and repeated movements etc. Later in 1869 doctor George Miller Beard spoke of *Neurasthenia* which became

[13] This chapter draws from the presentation of the paper *The Exptected return of the Hero* which was presented at the *Performing Protest: Re-Imagining The Good Life In Times Of Crisis* conference (2014, University of Leuven (B).)

known as the *American* disease as it occurred often in those who had made the journey to the *new* world and overstretched their nerve-system. Historian Roy Porter (1987) described those suffering from *Neurasthenia* as apathic and exhausted in his book *Social History of Madness*.
And although a survey of 5.435 participants, showed that these feelings are based more on perception than on real change (Glorieux, 2015) states we *do* feel stressed out and are unable to grasp the velocity.

Political sociologist Rosa (2010, p. 9,88; 2013, p. 72, 215) and media theorist Rushkoff (2013,9-10) both proclaim that on the surface of life everything is very hectic but just because of that, most people feel trapped in that permanent acceleration and velocity stress. Rosa speaks of a "self-reinforcing "feedback-system"." (2013, p. 151) and Rushkoff already connects the 9/11 attacks with a shift in society as he wrote: "If the end of the twentieth century can be characterized by futurism, the twenty-first can be defined by presentism. The looking forward so prevalent in the late 1990s was bound to end once the new millennium began. Like some others of that era, I predicted a new focus on the moment, on real experience, and on what things are actually worth right now. Then 9/11 magnified this sensibility, forcing America as a nation to contend with its own impermanence. People had babies in droves, and even filed for divorces, in what was at least an unconscious awareness that none of use lives forever and an accompanying reluctance to postpone things indefinitely." (2013,9-10)

In this matter, I would like to add the idea of measuring status through the number of *unique* experiences one *must* have in this (one and only) life. Baricco (2014) defined this as surfing from experience to experience. It brings us to a Faustian emptiness: we are ready to give everything for experiences but are left behind with a feeling of having gained 'nothing'. It seems that, for now, the technical possibilities do less to answer our deeper dreams and ambitions than initially thought.

Make-ability:
Another element has risen since the industrial revolution; the make-ability concept. In a world where gods gradually lost their impact on societies, an increasing belief in the makeable fate of individuals, aka the American dream, has rooted. Next to that the ancient boundaries of bloodlines and roots became less important.
Gradually the concept of personal responsibility for happiness grew stronger - since God no longer existed one had to achieve the goals in this one and only life. Therefore, if we *fail*, we ourselves are to blame. This makes us (audiences) heroic and vulnerable, hopeful and fearful.

Due to technical and medical evolutions, we got accustomed to the idea that we can re-do and re-boot our lives. Or otherwise stated, we took the

possibilities of 3-D printing to a personal level, whereby we believe that we should be what we can be.
This ultra-liberal idea nested in our societies and is proclaimed in all different tones: from the start-up communities, over social-media gurus. The belief that one can become what one wants if one works hard enough (and has a bit of luck), has been taken to a whole new level proclaiming that chances are scattered around and thus it comes down to seizing opportunities.

The make-ability idea became the guideline for successful living and led to a contemporary interpretation of the *survival of the fittest* competition. Besides, since more and more of us denounced god as a guiding element and thus no longer believe in an afterlife, one should take hold of all the possibilities; there is one life, so one should live it at its maximum.
Despite the amount of success stories and the exploitation of life-stories as that of e.g. Steve Jobs, the make-ability leaves audiences shattered, with feelings of failure especially when those who did make it are presented as exemplary heroes.

Transition:
A world in transition which does not have clear answers, is a world where we stumble from crisis to crisis and do not see a light, nor the end of the tunnel. Going from old to new leaves us searching for guides, those who claim to know the way: heroes. That we, in the turmoil, often choose figures that afterwards were not worthy of following, is a risk we seem to be taking over and over again.

The rise of populists and their ideas is strongly connected to societies in distress but furthermore they often use and recuperate heroes to ratify or justify their behaviour and ideologies. Hitler used Henry the Fowler (876-936), Putin uses Vladimir the Great (ca. 958-1015), Le Pen uses Jeanne d'Arc (1412-1431), etc. [14] Just like heroes, populists focus on dividing between *us* versus *them*, because every action the hero undertakes for his or her community is poised to harm another community.
The personality became as (or perhaps even more) important as the content because a flock in despair needs a shepherd. I believe that as long as the transition is not completed, as long as the *new* is not settled in and the *old* has not gone, no clear path will emerge and we will see the fading in and out of extreme opinions (and actions) formulated by populists, nationalists,

[14] On Henry the Fowler and his Nazi-legacy, by historian Sarah Greer: https://beyondthedarkages.wordpress.com/2015/06/17/nazis-in-the-nunnery/ and http://www.zeit.de/2000/43/Himmlers_Heinrich (Die Zeit)
On Vladimir and Putin claims: http://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/putins-crimean-history-lesson (the New Yorker) and http://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-putin-insists-crimea-20141204-story.html (Los Angles Times)

racists, preachers, dreamers. It is exactly this period of seeking and not yet finding with all sorts of (false) prophets which motivated the creation *Each One Alone*.
In this sense, I connect populism and heroism (in reality) with times of despair and transition.

These three elements come together in an elusive nostalgia; the velocity and make-ability in this transitional world made us look back (in the broadest sense). The digital era makes us homesick to something unknown and imaginative. This can be seen through the massive sales numbers of historical and fantasy fiction and the often naïve (and sometimes even dangerous) glorification of and identification with war-heroes. (See also: Martyr, part II)

A non-existing past seems the place where our needs would have been fulfilled, a place where social networks would exist, where there would be time for actual interaction, where craft was real, etc. The digital era makes us homesick to a past that did not occur, a fantasy. But paradoxically we try to achieve this old-world through modern and technological improvements: form Instagram nostalgic filters over Snapchat glasses to Airbnb experiences in slow cities, work holidays on boats and farms, take part in Spartacus marathons or even re-enact the past.[15] We are ever more growing into cyborgs and yet long for authentic and genuine emotional contact. Something the fictional hero happily serves to the needy.

The world needs new answers, new structures and as always, the hero is ready to *save* us again from our anxieties and insecurities with a contemporary face and interpretation of heroism.
Fictional heroes seem to be back on the foreground ready to sacrifice themselves, personalise our dreams and fears, entertain us and force us to reflect. Once again audiences can identify and *feel* like and with the hero; Booth describes this as "mental energy" (Booth, 1988, p. 298), the fictional hero as a try-out (ibid. p. 485) or as crash test dummy for its audience.
Therefore, fictional stories seem needed when reality does not answer our needs.

[15] This partially explains the success of historic series as *Downton Abbey* or *Vikings* and Fantasy series as *Game of Thrones*.

1.2.5. Defining heroism?

"Show me a hero and I'll write you a tragedy."
(*Notebook E*, F. Scott Fitzgerald)

"Hero: A person who is admired for their courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities."
(Oxford Dictionary)

Fictional heroes are empathic, changeable, adaptable, multi-interpretable, inspiring, entertaining. They overcome fear and traumas, have unique powers, are perseverant, can endure physical and mental pain. Fictional heroes can be lonely, or followed by many; they can be soft or harsh when needed, light or dark-toned when responsibility calls. They are alienating and comforting, loved and despised, imitated and declined. Fictional heroes are prophets, rebels, martyrs and whistle-blowers. Fictional heroes are close by and faraway. They are human, non-human and augmented humans, they are supra, Meta and concrete, they are universal and anecdotal.

Defining heroism seems even more complicated because it is closely connected with elements as morality, virtues etc. Therefore, I draw from four definitions, each one with its own specific ingredient, to develop a definition of a hero. By doing so, I hope to shed light on different definitions and interpretation of heroism.

Aristotle sees a clean-cut hero with impact, while *Rousseau* poses questions on the hero's morality and virtues, *Allison* and *Goethals* from their part believe that heroism is based on individual attribution, and finally *Franco0's*, *Blau's* and *Zimbardo's* heroic concept focusses on sacrifice and civic duty but also on the possible decay of heroism due to –what they label as – the *Lucifer* effect.
These four theses all relate to my work and the search for ambiguous fictional heroes (and thus ambiguous empathy).

a) Aristotle had a clear image of heroism, whereby he saw a connection between (tragic) heroes and the empathy of audiences, stating that a: "Tragedy is, then, a representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of a certain magnitude … [tragedy] represents men in action and does not use narrative, and through pity and fear it effects relief to these and similar emotions." [16] The reciprocal empathy is, thus, already emphasised in one of the earliest texts on narrative and heroism. Quinton and Meager (1960) concluded, based on Aristotle's *Poetics*, that heroes "must move us,

[16] Aristotle - Poetica 1449b

deeply and consciously, to an intensity of pity and fear which amounts to an emotional climax in us [the audience]".
What interests me in these quotes of Aristotle is the idea that heroes must be in "action" to be heroic: actions are necessary to be seen as a hero. The same goes for theatre; the actions of performers are necessary to ignite a happening between audience and performer.
Next to that the idea that heroes can bring audiences catharsis is connected to the morality in narratives.
Both elements, action and morality, are essential elements both in my artistic work and in this text.
(a practical guide for authors based on Aristotle's Poetics can be found in *Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters* (Tierno, 2002)).

b) Luckily, I am not alone in searching ways to combine heroism and morality as the Academy of Corsica already raised the question in 1751: "Which is the virtue most necessary for a hero and which are the heroes who lacked this virtue?" This question implies a step away from the rather rigid morality by Aristotle, who claimed that authors should not "show worthy men passing from good fortune to bad. … Nor again wicked people passing from bad fortune to good. That is the most untragic of all". [17] Aristotle advises that, in the end, villains should be punished and heroes be rewarded. We will see how, among others, Raney, Shafer and Bryant (2002, 2012) stretched such concepts and left creators more options than this moral straightforward rewarding-punishing path.

One of the philosophers who tried to answer the Corsican question was Rousseau. At first, he declined to define heroism, as he believed that we "cannot help but recognize it [heroism] when we see it." (Kelly, 1997)
This seems, at first, an easy escape by Rousseau but it clearly shows how essential nuances are when speaking of heroes and how personal attribution influences opinions on heroism. Later, and almost against his intentions, Rousseau does give a kind of heroic definition: "The virtuous man is just, prudent, moderate without being a hero on that account, and too frequently the hero is none of those things. … Just as one can perform actions of virtue without being virtuous, one can perform great actions without having the right to heroism. The hero does not always perform great actions; but he is always ready to do so if needed and shows himself to be great in all the circumstances of his life. That is what distinguishes him from the ordinary man." (Kelly, 2007) Rousseau thus brings the ambiguity and the attribution of heroes to the discussion table and he does not necessarily link heroic acts to being a hero.

[17] Aristotle - Poetica 1452b

Rousseau sees three types of heroes: conquerors, legislators and those who sacrifice themselves for the community. The ambiguity of heroism, the personality and virtue of the hero, the idolatry of followers all are elements which add some grey to the rather black and white Aristotelian hero.

This hands-on concept of Rousseau leaves us with morality-versus-goal dilemmas. What is interesting for me is the fact that doing *wrong* moral things does not automatically lead to becoming un-heroic.
The fact that morality and action can exclude each other without losing empathy from audiences became an important asset in the Borgia Trilogy (especially in the first two parts).

c) More recent the psychologists Allison and Goethals (2011) worked intensely on heroes and heroism but they too let the cup pass when it came to defining heroism: "we don't define who's a hero. You do. We think that whom people regard as heroes depends on a matching of a mental image of a hero with a mental image of a specific person. … the person becomes a hero *to the perceiver*." Later adding that: "*Defining a hero is like defining a good meal at a restaurant*. It depends on your values, your personal preferences, and maybe even what stage of life you are in." (2015). Allison and Goethals add the idea of the eye of the beholder to the discussion. We could even take this a step further by claiming that attributing a heroic status to a character reveals the inner framework, expectations or empathic sensibilities of both creator and audience. Or sloganised: Show me your hero and I'll tell you who you are.

This partially explains why heroes can receive such mixed receptions: if one cannot connect in an emotional, dramatic or ethical way with the depicted hero, the narrative will most likely not be appreciated. This does not mean an audience must agree with the actions or frameworks of the hero, since contrary characters can hold as much interest as those who think like us.
This proved to be a challenge when creating the Borgia trilogy, as we created figures that murdered and raped. Therefore, we had to counter-balance these actions with heroic features and develop a tunnel of necessity, an intrinsic and acceptable motivation that justified the means.

Fictional heroes can *address* the audience in a more or less personal way because audiences empathise with those heroes –based upon their own set of paradigms. The challenge is then to develop tunnel visions and contextualisation (backgrounds, dreams and wishes) audiences can relate to.
Since it is the audience who attributes the heroic-label, the hero can label the audience as its followers; this reciprocal and complicit-idea was used in the last part of the *Borgia Trilogy* and in *Each One Alone*.

I claim that in theory every character can be modelled and portrayed as likeable – changing the backstory, the opposition, the motivation etc. all are means to change perception and thus the empathy of audiences. Audiences can be seduced or beguiled, if creators contextualise and/or leave out information – in this sense audiences are confronted with unreliable narrators.

d) Finally, Franco, Blau and Zimbardo (2011) did come up with a definition: "Heroism represents the ideal of citizens transforming civic virtue into the highest form of civic action, accepting either physical peril or social sacrifice." This definition focusses on the altruistic nature of heroism and on the sacrifice of those heroes. The research of Zimbardo is interesting for our research as he developed both the Stanford-prison experiment and the concept of the *Lucifer* effect; the gradual decay of values when achieving power. [18]

Rodrigo Borgia is a such a *Lucifer* who lives with his own moral standards and who whitewashes his wrong actions in retrospect. Although his intention may be *good*, the outcome can be ambiguous or plain wrong.

In our performance *Raissonez* (2005) we played with such decay to its extremity.
We used the figure of Gilles de Rais (ca. 1405- 1440) who - in our version - wanted revenge as he had witnessed how *his* Jeanne d'Arc was cruelly burned at Rouen. The fact that de Rais was considered a hero by his contemporaries as he fought in the Hundred Years War is a poignant extra. De Rais faded from being a hero to being a villain. We brought together two basic facts: de Rais was fond of Jeanne d'Arc and was her patron and loyal servant and on the other hand he was shocked how the French nobility chose her as a scapegoat and sacrificed her. We invented that de Rais was deeply hurt and lost confidence in his compatriots and locked himself up in his different castles scattered all over France. There he soon became a lonely and bitter drunkard.

By accident he witnesses the pain parents encounter when one of their children dies, and it is here that our Gilles de Rais develops a perverse concept: the pain inflicted by the death of children was similar to the pain he had felt since Jeanne d'Arc was burned.
From then on, de Rais actively searched children and killed them. By developing this scheme, we answered the historical facts and tried to give

[18] For more on the Lucifer effect: see the Ted talk: The psychology of evil (2008) https://www.ted.com/talks/philip_zimbardo_on_the_psychology_of_evil?language=en

fictional (but perhaps true) answer to the *why* of the killing of at least 140 children by de Rais leading to his execution in 1440.[19]

Fig. 19: Raissonez © Bram Vandeveire – NUNC

Status of heroes?

Achieving a status, a satisfying position within the scheme of things or society is what most people long for. It is thus not strange that heroes are often considered as examples to be followed. The mythologisation of CEO's as Steve Jobs, Warren Buffet, politicians as Barack Obama, de Gaulle or artists as Beethoven, Picasso has been, at least partially created by the audience.
It is the audience that gives a position to someone.

Heroes exist in the eye of the beholder therefore they are to be attributed as heroes. Claiming to be a hero equals the loss of that status, although the examples mentioned were surely aware of their status and fictional heroes actively play with that status (vain heroes as e.g. Tony Stark)

Within narratives authors have - rudimentary stated - four elements that can be used to elevate the status of a character:
a) unique knowledge,
b) physical attraction,
c) financial assets
and d) consequential moral behaviour.

These elements all invoke admiration; it is therefore not surprising that heroes possess at least one of these elements.

[19] Source: Encyclopedia Britannica

Summarizing
The decay of the hero, the changing values, etc. are elements that blur the clean image of the Aristotelian hero. In my opinion, these shades of grey are essential when it comes to developing challenging, ambiguous and contemporary fictional heroes who evoke empathy.

Perhaps the reluctance to define heroism, its multi- interpretable and fluid form may just as well be its main asset. However, some elements return when discussing heroes:
a) Heroes act at a unique and specific moment in time although most of them long to become timeless,
b) The actions of heroes are considered as special, unique and can therefore be admired by others (both in and out of the narrative),
c) The hero reflects on his or her context and then chooses to act in search of change and transformation,
d) The hero is willing to endure physical and/or mental pain to achieve a goal,
e) The hero does exist through the personal and fluid attribution of others,
f) Heroes are entertaining, soothing, inspiring and are seen as exemplary leaders who are worthy of following, and
g) Heroism is in most cases connected to morality and empathy.

Conclusion
Being aware that I exclude elements, I would define a hero as:
A hero is a person who perceives a certain situation as wrong and develops an empathic rapport with the victims of that situation (which can include the hero). After critical reflection, the hero acts against the given status quo to change and transform his or her context for the better, accepting possible sacrifices to achieve that transformation.

extra:
Allison and Goethals found out that the **"***truest heroes are fictional heroes" and that fictional heroes are rated as "more* definitely good or bad than their real-world counterparts"
(Goethals & Allison, 2012, p. 193)

1.3. Chapter 3: The fictional hero as empathic tool

"Taught by time, my heart has learned to glow for other's good,
and melt at other's woe."
(*The Odyssey*, Homer)

"If a piece of fiction can allow us imaginatively to identify
with a character's pain,
we might then also more easily conceive of others identifying
with their own.
This is nourishing, redemptive; we become less alone inside."
(Review of Contemporary Fiction, David Foster Wallace)

First things first, I am not a psychologist.
But since the performing arts and narratives as a whole play with the minds of both the fictional characters and those of the audience, I turn towards the fields of psychology and sociology to try and understand the impact of narratives on audiences.

1.3.1. Defining empathy?

The previous chapter ended with a definition of heroes, this chapter begins with the search for a definition of empathy - although empathy seems as ungraspable as heroism.

I believe that empathy is the essential ingredient in (fictional) heroism; the hero needs to empathise with others to act, audiences need to empathise with the hero to indulge in the narrative, and in the theatre, performers need to develop empathy for the hero they are playing.
Empathy and heroism are, in my opinion, two sides of the same coin.

Empathy is often overlooked as a tool to draw a rapport between audience and creator. I work with empathy on the level of misguiding and luring audiences into empathising and comprehending the (ambiguous) actions of the protagonist/hero in the narrative. Within my work I focus on understanding - even agreeing - with actions and thoughts most audiences would normally not agree/empathise with.

Empathy seems to be everywhere as primatologist De Waal (2009) claims that the "ability to function in a group and build a support network is a crucial survival skill." In other words, empathy is essential to survive as species. Empathy is often regarded as *putting oneself in other's shoes* and recently became fashionable in business models, factories, offices or classrooms to e.g. improve group dynamics. [20] Political scientist Olson (2013) critically denounced such Empathic Marketing stating that: "putting oneself in another's shoes is a technique for selling them another pair".
Empathy came a long way from its origin and is no longer reserved for the Arts or narratives but has spread its wings into different layers and forms in society. Important for this research is that empathy gradually became considered as a tool to influence and steer audiences or customers.

The difference in (semantic) meaning between sympathy and empathy has been discussed by many and often leads to confusion. For this research, we describe sympathy as feeling *for* someone rather than feeling *as* someone, the latter became known as empathy. The difference is crucial, as sympathy does not necessarily lead up to mirroring the state or point of view of another. (See also: Glossary)

We can say that sympathy is the outsider's version of empathy, as it does not necessarily work on a shared emotional state or perspective partaking. Sympathy keeps a distance between the other and the self as one feels *for* while empathy searches ways to close that gap (this does not mean that feeling sympathy is an un-emotional process or shows a lack of interest).
Empathy does not equal erasing oneself, as it is the combination between *I* and the *other* that leads to a shared emotional state; one can imagine oneself to be in a specific situation while not actually encountering that situation. The combination between *I* and *other* is why person X can empathise with someone while person Y cannot. The ability to see the world as another is essential in empathy.

A clarifying example can be found in the way NGO's changed their campaigns overtime to propagate their cause. In the past, organisations tried to create sympathy, as they presented pictures of victims, starvation etc. which evoked compassion and feelings of guilt but no shared perspective. Nowadays, however we see a growing number of campaigns where attracting empathy stands central. We are shown pictures of e.g. perseverant and courageous farmers. Social philosopher Krznaric (2014, p. 148) sees: "images that portray the subjects with dignity and a sense of empowerment, such as a group of women farmers in Africa carrying hoes on their shoulders

[20] E.g.: Roots of Empathy, which mission it is to "build caring, peaceful, and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults". Source: project, http://www.rootsofempathy.org/

or children playing together near a water well. The latter photos are much more about empathy than sympathy: they reveal our common humanity with the subjects, and convey that they deserve our respect rather than our pity." Or as war photographer Marcus Bleasdale said: "To get through to people you have to show individuals touched by the conflict. That's how you engage people, how you shock them to maybe change their behaviour." (2014, quoted in Campbell). [21]

Oxfam, 1966

Oxfam, 2015 [22]

[21] For more on NGO's and empathy: see: Vossen, M. & Van Gorp, B. Eur J Dev Res (2016) The Battle of Ideas About Global Poverty in the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, and Flanders in *The European Journal of Development Research*, September 2016, pp. 1-18.
[22] Source: http://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/archivesandmanuscripts/tag/oxfam/ https://blogs.oxfam.org/en/blogs/15-12-10-gender-equality-because-its-2015 https://www.oxfam.org.au/what-we-do/food-and-climate/this-is-climate-in-action/coal-and-poverty/

In between: Journalists played a role in connecting audiences with misery all over the world, in a way, they became both advocates and interpreters. Due to the broadcasting of images and video, people all over the world can easily connect emotionally and empathically.

No matter the on-going discussion, it is safe to conclude that empathy combines both psychological and biological elements and that it is essential for understanding, learning and enriching our interaction with others. It is only when empathy is absent that the specific nature and value of empathy clearly emerges. We should thus not be surprised that there are many narratives on villainous characters without empathy (e.g.: *Richard III*, by Shakespeare, *American Psycho*, by Ellis).

Summarizing

Empathy is generally considered as a positive and essential element in communication and interaction with others. Without the ability to feel *as* someone else and change our perspective, both our lives and the (performing) arts would lose much of its intrinsic value and attraction but furthermore social interaction among humans would be impossible.
This research however will challenge the commonly accepted beneficial effects of empathy, as it searches ways whereby empathy can be used to empathise with fictional heroes and their moral viewpoints due to the form and specific nature of the hero.

Conclusion
I would define empathy as the ability to embody, take part and/or mirror the emotional and mental state of another perspective. Empathy in the performing arts is the combination of a shared imagination where the self (the audience) and the other (the fictional character) work reciprocally.

In between: moving examples of identification, empathy, and perspective-taking can be found in the Je suis Charlie, Bruxelles, Orlando-commemorations, another example is the "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech by J.F. Kennedy.

(For more on the history of empathy, See also: Appendix A: A short history of Empathy – Neurology and Art)

1.3.2. The interplay between heroes and empathy.

Allison and Goethals (2017) claim that audiences praise their heroes so high that they eventually judge them with bias. Since heroes must live up to the expectations - every misstep can be enough to cut the cord between audience and fictional hero: "we enter into an implicit exchange relationship with our heroes. … We agree to give heroes our adulation and support, but in return they must maintain an idealized image of human greatness … our greatest heroes cannot get away with anything less than near-perfect moral behavior". This means that there is a constant stress on the rapport between hero and audience, the hero must deliver what audiences *want* and at the same time remain exciting enough to watch, read or experience in the theatre. To answer audiences' expectations authors must find an equilibrium between giving what audiences *want*, and what they - being creators - themselves *need*. Messick (2005) described this process as loyalty for such heroes, as they deserve our gratitude due to their behaviour and actions, heroism and empathy work, based on "reciprocity".
This interplay between need and want forms a challenging element of the hybrid hero, where both want and need are under pressure.

The empathy a hero inflicts is thus not automatically a lasting one; it has to be conquered with every scene, chapter or dialogue. Allison and Goethals leave us with an ominous thought which may be interesting in creating ambiguous heroes: "Maintaining one's heroic status may be just as challenging as becoming a hero in the first place. Ironically, one of the most common ways to become a villain is to become a hero first."

I believe that most heroes (including those in my work) are empathic towards certain persons. This is what Campbell (2008, p. 28), in my opinion, thought of when he spoke of "*the call to Adventure*": the situation *calls* for an empathic hero. I would therefore rather speak of the *Empathic Call for Adventure*: The hero is confronted with a stability that for some reason is not beneficial for the community the hero empathises with (this stability can be the reign of a dictator, a war, a loneliness, etc.). [23] Therefore, the hero develops empathy with a concrete victim of that situation –which can be the

[23] The stability in a narrative is not necessarily a good, calm or stabile setting but the situation, the state in which audiences meet the characters.

hero himself. The hero's will to sacrifice, to offer oneself stems, in my opinion, from empathy with the community he or she belongs to (e.g. Achilles is only empathic with his community [24]). Seymour's statement (1975, p. 62): "One man's freedom fighter is another one's terrorist" still holds value as the label 'hero' depends on the eye of the beholder, the culture, context, personal background, etc. This immediately raises a troubling consequence: if heroes act for their community, do they then not harm other communities? In most narratives, such other communities will be left out of the narrative as it focuses on the hero and its (moral) goal. Nevertheless, we must conclude that heroic stories are heroic due to the narrative framing of the creator whereby actions can be considered good or wrong, depending on the community one belongs to. (One could re-write classic narratives from another point of view and develop a whole new empathy.)

Empathy is thus, in my opinion, both the binding element between heroes and audiences and between heroes and narratives: the audience feels with and *as* the hero, and the hero feels with and *as* the problematic stability. (This *in* and *out* will prove an asset when developing hybrid heroes.)
Empathy is mostly seen as a positive social occurrence but it seems that fictional heroes have the ability to blacken such beneficial social qualities.

In between: The combination of empathy and loyalty can form a problem. Empathising with one character could mean to one must be disloyal to another. E.g. Walter White - from the TV-series Breaking Bad - is loyal to his wife and son. Because of that he is automatically disloyal to his brother in law (who is police officer) and the law. Overtime Walter has cooked enough meth to sustain his family, yet he goes on with his illegal practices and at that moment be becomes disloyal to his family and loyal to his new formed family, the illegal drug traffickers.

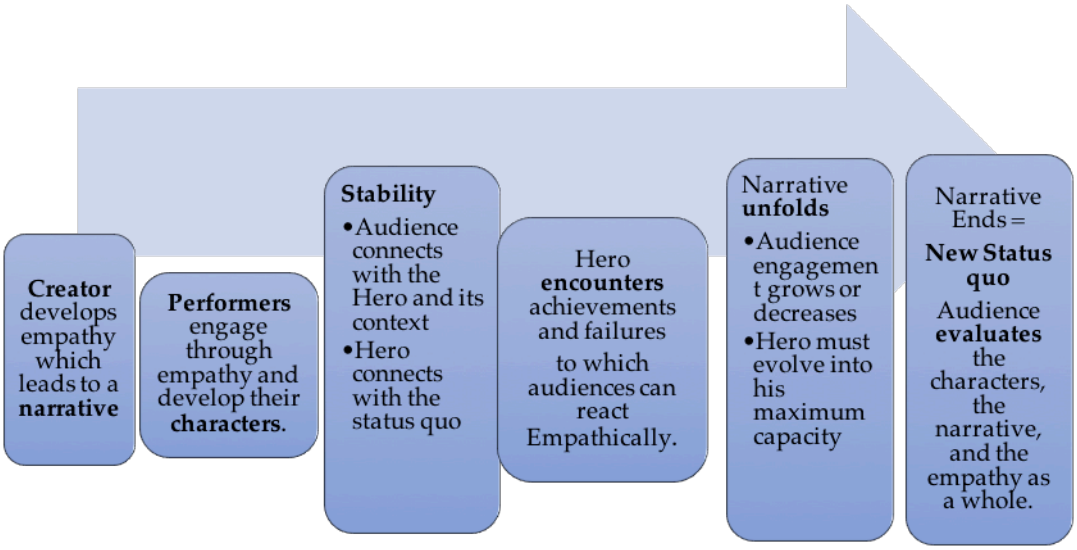
Empathic line

Filmmaker and social entrepreneur Apkon (2013, p. 11) suggests that storytellers are, among other things, empathic observants: "All good storytellers, in whatever media, are first keen observers of the world around them. They see nuance and story in the small details of life, and they possess the skills to convey these observations in compelling ways."

[24] Achilles is inconsolable because of the death of Patroclus but acts insensible when he drags Hector three times around the outer walls of Troy. The feelings of revenge are so strong that they push away any form of Empathy. (This is a challenging moment in Achilles' status for readers, one could easily decide that the means are no longer connected to the ends).

Because of this interconnection I try to deduce an empathic line that schematically outlines how empathy steers (my) creative work - from idea to presentation:
- Creators develop an empathic rapport with a person or a situation because it grasps their (emotional) attention.
- Creators see a narrative value in this empathic reaction and create a narrative whereby the initial empathy is used and further developed into the characters and situations.
- Within theatre, film or TV-series this empathy then evolves into the performers, who in their own turn develop an empathic rapport with the created character.
- Within the narrative, the hero develops empathy within the fictional arena (not necessarily purely based on altruistic motivations) and therefore accepts the empathic *call to adventure* and starts to destabilise the stability.
- Then, audiences can empathise and interpret this empathy during and after the encounter with the heroic narrative.

Heroes seem perfectly equipped to create such fictional worlds where empathy is used and misused. By focussing on empathy, creators focus on impact even if that means that within their fiction good and bad need to mirror each other.



1.3.3. Empathy and Brecht

> "Right in the middle of it [rehearsing 'Surabaya Johnny' from the Threepenny Opera],
> I stopped for a second and said:
> 'Brecht, you know your theory of epic theatre
> -maybe you don't want me just to sing it the way I sang it-
> as emotional as "Surabaya Johnny" has to be done?' …
> He said: 'Lenya, darling, whatever you do is epic enough for me.'
> (Interview with Lotte Lenya, 1994)

The ability to empathise is an essential ingredient of how I see and work with heroism: it transforms characters into heroes and it evokes reactions within audiences and it is the trigger for both creators and performers.

Sharing emotions is considered essential in empathy and in the arts, especially in the physical reality of theatre. The transmission between character and performer, between performer and audience is, among other things inherent of the narrative, one that is based on reciprocity between creators and audiences. In this context Baker (1919) defined theatre as "the shortest distance from emotions to emotions" while Artaud declared that "the actor is an athlete of the heart", both see a shared affect or empathy as essential in theatre. In this matter Brecht (2003, in Kuhn & Steve) cannot be left out as he claims that "the entire technique of empathy has become dubious" as he searched ways to "provide space to reflect on, even refuse, one's immediate reactions" according to art historian Cronan (2014). Brecht searched a different type of affect, one whereby reflecting *on* predominates feeling *as* or *for*.

Although Brecht's Alienating effects did not rule out emotional or engaged acting they did confront audiences with the social or political relevance of the narrative and the possible reflection and subsequent changes such narratives could cause. According to theatre scientist Eddershaw (1994, p. 278, 228).) "The plays that Brecht wrote for his epic theatre were intended to serve a socio-political function and therefore, he argued, required a different kind of performance style. From his very early days as a writer/director he wanted to reduce - not eliminate – the audience's empathy with the characters on stage in order to aid their intellectual understanding of the events presented." Brecht saw parallels between epic acting and witnesses in a police report; one describes what one has seen and although there are emotions involved, it does not lead to an identification with the characters one describes

Brecht (1974, in Willet) said in his *A Short Organum for the Theatre* that: "In order to produce A-effects the actor has to discard whatever means he has learnt of getting the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays."

Brecht opposed to the usage of emotional memory as Stanislawski proclaims. The performer and the character were not, in Brecht's opinion, meant to merge but had to live next to each other. It was exactly this unique intertwining and overlapping that, according to Brecht, made performing valuable because it had the power to inflict questions that could lead to an awareness and change in the status quo. It led to his well-known quote: "Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it."
Brecht paraphrains Trotsky (1974, ibid) explained how he saw the epic performer as follows: "He has just to show the character, or rather he has to do more than just get into it; this does not mean that if he is playing passionate parts he must himself remain cold. It is only that his feelings must not at bottom be those of the character, so that the audience's may not at bottom be those of the character either." (at bottom must be understood as fully, totally)

Brecht emphasised the importance of the performer as a person: the unique personality of a performer was there to be used and no longer to be erased. Brecht played an intense game with showing and experiencing situations and "actors perceive a shift in balance in performing Brecht from character to plot, from role to story-telling, and see the importance of comedy in Brechtian roles and scenes, not only as a distancing device but as a way of making the message entertaining and accessible." (Eddershaw, 1994)

I draw from both Brecht and Stanislawski as I search ways to render empathy and develop an after-effect (whereby I see the act of feeling *with* a character as a lubricant rather than as the essence of theatre). I hope that once the emotional identification or connection has passed, the narrative will leave a sediment of reflection, perhaps be the germ of discussions. The empathy with characters is in my opinion, a tool, to adopt foreign ideas and concepts, to embrace the *other*, to reflect on oneself and society -such goals do not equal pamphleting fables or chippy storytelling. I believe that the message may not prevail over the aesthetic or emotional quality of a work, because if that is the case we are confronted with instructional art or even of propaganda. (More on the moral impact in Chapter 4)

In between: I, as many others, want to give something more than the narrative; I am searching for theatrical ways to inflict reflection, moral ambiguities, and empathy with other characters. Without this meta-input

the arts, the performances I create would, in my opinion, lose a fundamental raison d'être.
I realise that performing arts write in the sand but how could I furiously write and rehearse if the aim was not to leave some traces in audiences' minds and hearts?

1.3.4. Artistic practice: Creating empathy?

Paradoxically, empathy with characters we dislike is perfectly possible within narratives, partly due to the alleged safety of fiction and thus a perceived risk-free moral swap. Furthermore, it is my experience that audiences can empathise with ambiguous moral actions, in fiction, if the fictional proposition is presented in such a way it feels inevitable.


Fig. 20: Raissonez © Benjamin Van Tourhout

I have experienced this phenomenon in, among others, the *Borgia*-trilogy and *Raisonnez*.
I came to the conclusion that presenting moral concepts which oppose commonly accepted ethics, could form a tool to maximise reflection: the fact that audiences went along with such ambiguous moralities brings them to reflect on their empathy towards the character in the narrative.

It is my belief, that the affirmation of common moral is less provocative, less challenging for contemporary audiences who rightly so grew allergic to (obvious and preachy) morals in narratives.
Besides, if we follow Aristotle's these that narratives should infect audiences with fear and pity, creators should search contemporary means to accomplish just that (even if that means trespassing the borders of clean morality).

In between: Emotional Memory by Stanislawski (1989) and Strasberg (2015):The process of empathising and/or mimicking gestures and emotional states stood central in many modern acting techniques: Stanislawski worked on emotional memory, and imagination while Strasberg developed his Method whereby performers sought ways to identify - mirror - the character by using the personal experiences and sensations. Strasberg draws from Aristotle, who claimed that the secret to move the passions in others is to be moved oneself, and that moving oneself is made possible by using the "visions" of experiences from life. Acting is in

many cases seen as the capacity of playing someone else, although acting is not the same as doing impressions, it is a way for performers to present their mirroring talent: see, e.g. Kevin Spacey at Inside the Actors Studio.[25]

The Magical "*As If*" or the Particularisation by Meisner (1987):
Meisner came up with the concept of Particularisation as tool for performers "to evolve for yourself a situation that would bring you personally to the emotional place you need to be in for the sake of the scene." (p. 136). Therefore, the as-if question is used: as if the performer is at the spot, as if he or she sees, feels, experiences the situation. Meisner opposed to the idea that a performer had to physically experience similar situations in order to perform them: "You don't need to completely immerse yourself in a world to play a part. e.g., no need to visit an asylum to play in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*." (p.143-144)
The as if has been explored by Stanislawski and was taken to another level by e.g. Grotowski and Strasberg who replaced the as if by actually experiencing situations and subsequent emotions.
Whatever the method, most would agree that a performer should, in some way or another, reflect and then physicalise these (emotional) reflections.
Next to that "actors are aided by the fact that songs and characters are created to be performed – they lack the psychological "messiness" of real people. They are created, streamlined, without wasted words, actions or emotions. Fiction is created as an abstraction of the social world" (Goldstein, 2014).

Goldstein et al. (2010) found that performers were more skilled than non-performers in Theory of Mind.[26] As they worked intensively on the correlation between empathy and performers, they found that "actors do not excel in empathy … while actors show and perceive a wide variety of emotions on stage, they may do so without actually *feeling* as these emotions".

Taylor et al. (2003) on the other hand, did find proof that authors had a more intense empathic reaction than the norm, specifically for fantasy and on empathy taking, but Taylor et al. assume that these higher levels of empathy could be the result of the cultivation and training writers undergo through their work – this would be proof that empathy can be trained but also that those who empathise more easily search narratives that focus more on empathic effect.

[25] source: Kevin Spacey's Impressions - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIQMptnTf0s
[26] *Theory of Mind* can be defined as understanding the mental state of another person.

In between: To my surprise Goldstein, (2014, p. 264) found out that audiences "judged the actor's internal state to be more likely to match the character's external state for the technique actor than for the method actor." It seems that the emotional involvement, which is a corner stone of the method, does not necessarily lead up to a higher perception or emotional mirroring by audiences. If generating empathy within audiences would be the main focus, performers than would be better off choosing the Technique rather than the Method.

From an artistic point of view, generating empathy is the crux, it is clear that empathy often comes unexpected and that audiences' reactions are unpredictable. The personal background, ethical paradigms and their emotional status when they experience are decisive. Nevertheless, it seems that there are certain tools that facilitate empathy.

The similarity between the fictional character and the audience is a tool to strengthen identification, it makes audiences susceptible as they re-live situations when fictional characters encounter similar (life-changing) events as mourning, feeling in love, etc. The similarity works on a shared background, thus working with elements from the past.
Probability, on the other hand, works on imagination of audiences, as they can imagine that such and such event portrayed in the narrative, could also happen to them in reality. This explains why certain parts of the audience cannot emotionally engage themselves with e.g. horror or Fantasy genres or art-forms as opera or S.F.

The fact that audiences need to engage themselves in probability, not only makes them more active during the experience of the narrative, they also feel and think more than the one-on-one copy when feeling similar as the characters. Probability invites audiences to anticipate the narrative and judge the characters; by doing so audiences attribute relevance to the character.

If audiences are *hooked* and attach themselves emotionally then creators must try and hold the line. This is a thin line as audiences may feel for the characters, but just like with heroes, they expect a certain behaviour of the fictional characters. The characters are, in this sense, property of both the creator and the audience as audiences imagine a path which they want to see played out. If creators do not follow the anticipation of audiences and want to hold the empathic line, then creators will have to come up with a plot that outdoes the imagination of audiences, on the one hand, but that, on

the other, remains faithful to the flow of the narrative. This is a tricky point in narratives, as many creators want to surprise their audiences but by doing so cut the empathic cord. Empathy does come with an exciting equilibrium between surprise, expectation and satisfaction. Fiction may be make-belief, but if it wants to be *believed* it should be more consistent than reality, thus focus on cause and effect logic while leaving out elements as coincidences or actions without causality.[27]

Next to that the personal elements of audiences as age, belief, background, education, roots, previous encounters with narratives or the creative team, … all play important roles.

1.3.5. Impact of heroes and empathy

"To transfer from our inward nature a human interest
and a semblance of truth"
(*Biographia literaria*, Coleridge)

"The poet's aim is either to profit or to please."
(*Ars Poetica*, Horace)

In 2011 Allison and Goethals set up a survey to find out who was considered a hero. To their surprise the survey showed that 34% of the generated heroes were fictional. Thus, a third of the mentioned heroes were *un-real* with expected characters as Han Solo, James Kirk, Superman, Batman, Karate Kid, Rocky Balboa, Robin Hood, Huckleberry Finn or Tarzan (32% named family member as heroes, the other 34% attributed the status of a hero to underdogs, sport stars, entertainers, heads of state, etc.).
These results confirm the idea that heroes in narratives do have an impact on their audience, that heroes are considered as essential and inspiring figures in the lives of audiences.

This brings me to conclude that:
a) The hero is a construction and a tool,
b) The author wants audiences to react,
c) Creators have an intended audience in mind when creating (and thus anticipate reactions and empathy), d) Within the narrative nothing happens by chance or accident, and finally
e) Creators can choose to add (moral, political, etc.) meta-layers in search of (after)effects.

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[27] See also: Van Tourhout, B. (2016). Sympathy with the Devil or Playing with Empathy. In Q. Gauld, P. Morrison, & V. Wain (Eds.), *Promises, Pedagogy and Pitfalls*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press.

Narratives portray a dense life, one where the highs and lows are compressed. Allison and Goethals (2012) claim that this densification leads to "sharper outlines, and with fewer flaws and frailties than real people" and that "Their creators can make them especially prototypical." Although it is tempting to accept this viewpoint, the belief that heroes act with "fewer flaws and frailties" is challenged throughout this research on hybrid heroes. The idea that creators develop heroes who are "prototypical" and "with sharper outlines" however, is one I am happy to use when creating.
Although many authors in the past have indeed implemented clear-cut moral in their narratives, today these narratives with their straight-forward moral are not attracting as much empathy as they once did. [28] I hope to show that when it concerns the hybrid hero this does not mean narratives have lost their moral function, on the contrary as I believe that the "flaws and frailties" can be intensified instead of diminished for the sake of moral.

Within my work I have left the Aristotelean path whereby the good characters win and the villains are punished, as I believe that such black and white morality no longer *works* when searching for impact, fear, pity or reflection. Nevertheless, narratives on Superheroes often do exactly the opposite as they are search ways to instruct, console and/or comfort their audiences with exemplary or escapist heroic narratives.
In my opinion, there is no better or worse, it depends on the need of audiences and the want of creators. In this light Schechner's (2006, p. 46) 7 interlocking functions of performances are worth mentioning: to entertain, to make something that is beautiful, to mark or change identity, to make or foster community, to heal, to teach-persuade or convince, to deal with the sacred and/or demonic. It seems that creators can cherry-pick different functions just because heroes are such mouldable beings.

You are the topic…
You are the centre.
You are the occasion.
You are the reason why.
(*Offending the Audience*, Peter Handke)

I see four basic elements that are essential in attracting empathy:
a) the content,
b) the form and language of the narrative,
c) the text
and d) the specific performer.

[28] e.g. Medevial Morality Plays.

These four elements are the basic building blocks I use to develop a liaison; they are intended to generate impact, their focus is, thus, on the audience.
Neurologist Gallese reserves a special role for language - which is essential in many narratives - besides the emotions and actions of the performers. Gallese (2009) claims that: "Language is a social enterprise in which action plays a crucial role." In the theatre, this "social enterprise" is instantly tangible, as audiences hear the spoken words, with the specific timbre and quality of the performer. This makes theatre an exciting but risky happening: what if the sought empathy is not taking place? Or what if the audience is empathising extremely? And who is to blame if it goes wrong, or not as intended? (cf. Opening night Borgia part I, Homo Carnale).

(For more on mirror Neurons and the Arts, See: Appendix A: A short history of Empathy – Neurology and Art)

Mirroring is an essential part of the *jouissance* as Barthes (1973) defined the (orgasmic) pleasure of engaging and almost bodily encountering narratives. In the case of performing arts *jouissance* would be the pleasure of *experiencing* performers and their narratives. Audiences, just as the performers, take part in this *jouissance* as they both willingly accept the fictional situation and empathise or mirror the depicted emotions themselves. This process whereby audiences accept the fiction became known as the *willing suspension of disbelief* (Coleridge, 1817, p. 365) which is described as: "to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith." This does not mean that audiences lose the *self*, or that they are unaware of the reality/existence of the performers but that they *accept* the fictional world as credible and truthful a.k.a. Alief, introduced by philosopher Gendler in 2008. (Alief describes the disruptive combination of knowing and believing. E.g. one stands on the transparent floor in the Grand Canyon and one knows it is safe but alieves the danger, or one watches a sad movie and one knows it is fiction but alieves the sadness)

The *willing suspension* is an important step in creating empathy, and logically arises from the four basic elements (content, form, text and performer). It is an *action* audiences must undertake, which shows the reciprocal nature of theatre (in German one speaks of einfühlungs*vermögen*, the *ability* to empathise). Audiences that accept the "semblance of truth" are prepared to engage, mirror the feelings and empathise with the fictional characters.

1.3.6. Dangerous empathy?

> Poker players, police profilers, military strategists, con artists, Internet scammers, method actors,
> and everyday romantic Casanovas engage in similar forms of tactical empathy
> when they attempt to assume the perspective and affective stance of an avowed opponent, victim, portrayed figure, or desired subject, and base their future actions on some form of mimicry that allows them to win the game, gain a strategic advantage, capture, fool, portray, or seduce someone else.
> (*The Dark Side of Empathy*, Burband and Willerslev)

We should not kid ourselves and must acknowledge that empathy with fiction is not solely positive or entertaining as it can lead to uncritical audiences and to fact-fiction reversals. Just as in the real world, every form of artistic instruction can be used to instruct *wrong*.
It was, among others, Brecht who spoke of the dangers of empathy in theatre, as he feared that empathy could rule out reflection. Drawing from Brecht, I would speak of *sedating* empathy whereby the tools are solely used to generate empathy (cf. escapist narratives) and the review of the narrative is limited to the instant empathy the narrative evokes.
The empathic reactions can be divided into the creators' wishes and the audiences responses. Propaganda, censorship or boycott are examples of creators' goals while over-identification (Werther-effect, copy-cat, etc.), fact fiction reversal, becoming off-guard are responses from audiences.

In between: A fascinating case study can be found in the NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst) and Laibach performances which used over-identification in a paradoxical manner and therefore coincides with my claims on presenting wrong moral in order to stimulate moral reflection. NSK and, its avant-garde music wing, Laibach, overemphasised the communist-ideology in order to mock and criticise it. They used symbols from both the Nazi and Communist parties which left audiences and political leaders in confusion; what to think of concerts whereby Laibach members are wearing "uniforms which resemble those of Nazi or fascist soldiers" and where the "staged concerts are orchestrated as imitations of Nazi and Stalinist rituals and they mimic the threatening façade of these movement's leader. Their spectacular performances reference the mass ritual demonstrations of Tito's time" (Heise, 2007, p. 273). Such performances assume that empathy and art do have influence and can

change societies and instead of criticizing existing paradigms they paradoxically glorify them (a tool we used within the Borgia trilogy).
Žižek (2002) spoke of positive over-identification because it "'frustrates' the system (the ruling ideology) precisely insofar as it is not its ironic imitation, but over-identification with it - by bringing to light the obscene superego underside of the system, over-identification suspends its efficiency." Because of this over-affirmation creators develop a challenging and disturbing playfield.

Not only Brecht opposed to such *sedating* empathy. Also, Plato feared that theatre has the "power to corrupt, with rare exceptions, even the better" which made him ban theatre from his ideal Republic. [29] According to Ridout (2009, pp. 18-24) Plato opposed to the theatre for a number of reasons whereby truth and truthfulness were pivotal:
a) authors had no first-hand experiences on what they wrote e.g. Homer never fought in battle but still described the Trojan Wars,
b) because of narratives audiences confuse fact and fiction,
c) performers adopt ideas and emotions that are alien to them and thus they are infected - therefore Plato advises that performing should only be done by slaves which he sees as inferior in his ideal Republic,
d) because of the falseness from narratives audiences lose the capacity to find happiness in real life and,
e) the wrong moral in the narratives will corrupt audiences. Some of these theses do ring a bell even today, e.g. the critique on gaming and its possible negative effects in reality.

However, by banishing the theatre and the Arts, Plato paradoxically glorified the empathic impact the theatre has on its audiences. Due to the expulsion of theatre from his ideal state Plato acknowledged the powers of narratives and performers and was among the first to confirm the empathic power of narratives and heroes.
While Plato saw a dangerous empathic rapport between the arts and the audience, it is not hard to find more positive tendencies towards empathy and its effect on audiences. Palmer (1992) said that one of the consoling effects of art is that it "dwarfs our own little concerns, which is a step nearer to being sensitive to the 'reality' of other people", going further that art ignites appreciation and empathy for other (fictional) beings. Palmer, thus, links responses to art with interaction and empathy between real people.

Booth (1988) introduces the try-out concept whereby he sees narratives as a tool to try-out lives and actions without the (physical) harmful effects. According to Booth, narratives "offer a both relative freedom from consequence and, in their sheer multiplicity, a rich supply of antidotes. In a

[29] Plato. The Republic, Book 10-605c.

month of reading, I can try-out more "lives" than I can test in a lifetime.", although Booth points out that we still have to deduce "the deceptive heroes and villains, saints and sinners who offer themselves to us from our first years onward" (p. 485). The sum of all the narratives we consume will render a unique and personal set of concepts and ideas as "we try-out each new pattern of desire against those that we have found surviving past reflections, and we then decide, in an explicit or implicit act of ethical criticism, that this new pattern is or is not an improvement over what we have previously decided to desire" (p. 272).

This try-out idea nested in my head because on the one hand it is something we in the theatre are confronted with all the time on a practical level: as authors and performers we try-out different shapes and faces of characters, we try to *become* another as we try-out characters and thoughts. And on the other hand, it felt as an ideal model for audiences to engage with narratives: while they safely encounter narratives, they can empathise with the characters without the dangers or consequences the protagonist encounters.
Individual members of the audience witness and can feel *with* or *for* the characters, audiences can reflect whether the choices the protagonist took (and the audience tried-out with them) could have any value in their real lives. If what Booth claims would prove to be true, then the impact of narratives and art would be clearly laid out. Not only would audiences be able to see matters from a different perspective, they would also learn the arguments that led to a certain decision.
The concept of try-out as proposed by Booth was liberating and inspiring throughout the entire research period.

Schiller (2002 [1784]) wrote, "The stage is, more than any other public institution, a school of practical wisdom, a guide to our daily lives, an infallible key to the most secret accesses of the human soul." Ridout (2009, p. 15) deepens this viewpoint when stating: "Theatre inserts its ethical questions into the lives of its spectators in a situation in which those spectators are usually conscious of their own status of spectators … [the] situation of mutual spectatorship raises the ethical stakes in theatre in a way that is not quite possible anywhere else."
Perhaps the most *dangerous* effect of empathy is the so-called Werther-effect [30] as it combines over-identification, strong mirroring and fact-fiction reversal. Goethe himself was highly surprised and baffled by the effect his *Werther* had on audiences: "Just as I felt relieved and light-hearted because I had succeeded in transforming reality into poetry, my friends were

[30] The term Werther-effect was coined in 1974 by the sociologist David Phillips to describe imitative suicidal behaviour transmitted via the mass media. See also: http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/conf/memepap/marsden.html

confusing themselves by believing that they had to turn poetry into reality, enact the novel and shoot themselves!" (Goethe, in Tantillo, 2010, p.81).
The same effects have been seen with Oliver Stone's satire *Natural Born Killers* (1994) and its ultra-violent protagonists Mickey and Mallory Knox who were invitingly dangerous.
I imitated and enjoyed mirroring Mickey myself while Stone wanted to indict the media-hunger for violence. Stone said on the matter: "What I was doing was pointing the finger at the system that feeds off that violence, and at the media that packages it for mass consumption. The film came out of a time when that seemed to have reached an unprecedented level. It seemed to me that America was getting crazier." (interview in the Guardian by Brooks, 2002)
Lawrence (1994) connected Stone's message with the fading aura of heroes and saw a glorification of anti-heroes: "The problem is that, despite Stone's blunt message, the American public has been cheering along in all the wrong places, willing on the anti-heroes in an eerie echo of the current lionisation of O J Simpson."

Another clear, but perhaps less expected, example of a Werther-after-effect can be seen in the responses to the *Finding Nemo* movie. The film was released in 2003 and the protagonist (Nemo) was a clownfish. Audiences strongly empathised with Nemo and since then the sales of clownfish "soared" resulting in a dramatic - 75% - drop of clownfish in their natural habitat (Dickinson, 2012). Fact-fiction reversal occurred as some spectators "take the movie to heart and try to set their fish free." Thus, audiences buy clownfish only to release them, not realizing that by doing this *noble* act they bring the clownfish population to its knees. Such explosions of uncontrolled empathy have been seen earlier with e.g. Disney's *101 Dalmatians* whereby young puppies eventually grow into larger animals, resulting in a run on animal shelters who saw a 300% increase of Dalmatian dogs (Zarrella, 1997). Even *Hedwig*, Harry Potters white owl, led to a Werther-effect as fans of the Potter novels wanted to buy their own white owl and thus have their own Hedwig; to *feel* more as Harry? (BST, The Telegraph, 2009).

We ourselves encountered a Werther-effect within the *Borgia trilogy* when audiences enjoyed the gruesome Borgia-actions and grew empathic with (even rooted for) the hybrid hero, rather than with the victims.

(See also: "Inside the Mind of a Psychopath," by Kent A. Kiehl and Joshua Buckholtz; *Scientific American Mind*, September/October 2010.)

In between: Augusto Boal created different technique for performers whereby try-out and transformation stood central. The idea itself is rather simple but in the light of The Theatre of the Oppressed, it proved to be

helpful and challenging: Performers perform the same scene twice (usually a scene linked with oppression). During the replay, any member of the audience can shout 'Stop!', step forward and take the place of one of the oppressed characters, showing how they could change the situation to enable a different outcome. Different spectators may explore several alternatives. Originally the technique was developed by Boal as a political tool for change (part of the Theatre of the Oppressed), but it has been widely adapted for use in educational contexts. (Boal, 2004 and Farmer, 2014)

Fig. 21: The Borgia Trilogy - Part II, Homo Fatale
© Bram Vandeveire – NUNC

1.3.7. Effects of empathising?

"Art is like food – even if you don't like it, it has some nutritional value."
(*Assessing the intrinsic Impacts of a live performance*, Brown and Novak)

"The arts and science are essential to the prosperity of the state
and to the ornament and happiness of human life.
They have a primary claim to the encouragement
of every lover of his country and mankind."
George Washington

The survey of the National Endowment for the Arts (Nichols, et al., 2009) reveals that attendees of cultural events (museums, theatre, etc.) develop a stronger sense of empathy and act accordingly: "more than half of all adults who attended art museums or live arts events said they had volunteered at least once in the past year." The same report claimed that that attending or participating in the arts leads up to *consuming* more arts and other social behaviour. Furthermore, reading does seem to have profound impact on the

empathic and social behaviour, since: readers are more than twice as likely as non-readers to volunteer or do charity work. Adults who read well are more likely to volunteer than basic and below-Basic readers.

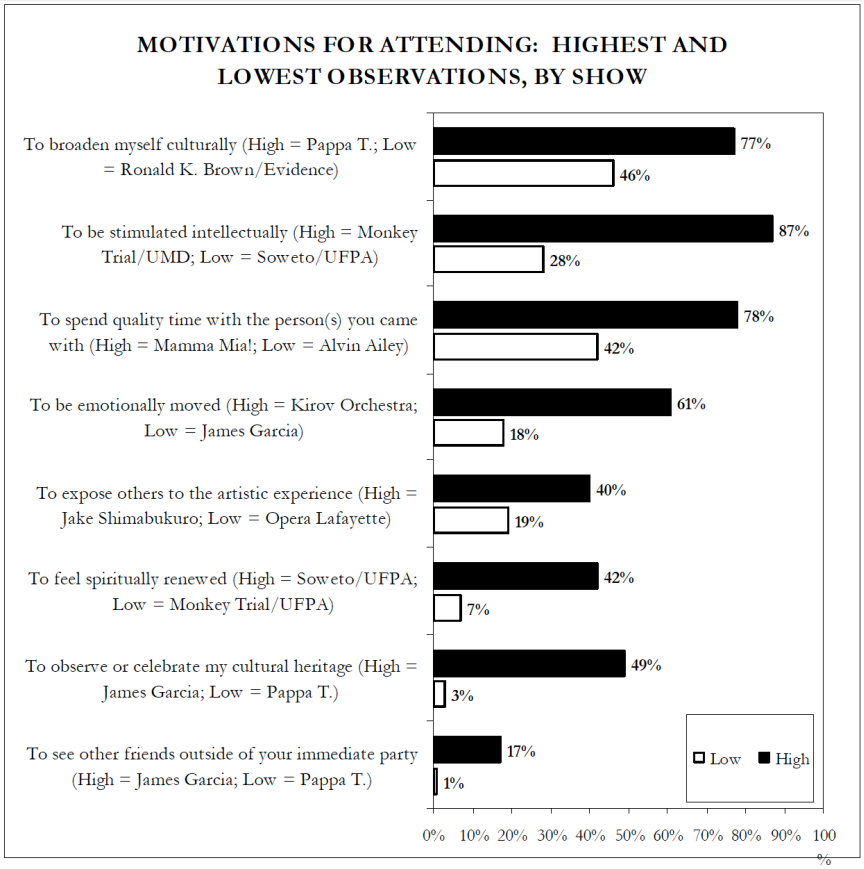
In 2007 Brown and Novak undertook the research project *Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance* in which they attempted "to define and measure how audiences are transformed by a live performance". During 2006, 19 performances were surveyed (over 3000 persons). Brown and Novak came up with a set of intrinsic reasons why audiences attended theatre performances: captivation, intellectual stimulation, emotional resonance, spiritual value, aesthetic growth and social bonding.

Brown and Novak suggest that theatregoers use these intrinsic reasons to measure satisfaction and add that theatre companies can use these elements to change their (external) communication and (internal) mission. The specific motivations to attend a specific performance were decisive in choosing, Brown and Novak saw motivations as: to broaden myself culturally, to be stimulated intellectually, to spend quality time with the person(s) you came with, to be emotionally moved, to expose others to the artistic experience, to feel spiritually renewed, to observe or celebrate my cultural heritage, to see friends outside of your immediate party. An example: The motivation for attending performances as *Mamma Mia* was mainly based on spending "quality time with the person you came" while the motivation for attending the LA Theatre Works' *The Great Tennessee Monkey Trial* was "to be stimulated intellectually". (see, next page)

(For more: Motivations Matter: Findings and Practical Implications of a National Survey of Cultural Participation,2005, by Francie Ostrower.) In between: Musekeweya, a Rwandese radio soap was launched as "a healing tool for psychological wounds that were caused by the genocide, with the aim of ensuring that Rwandans could live together peacefully again." It started in 2004 with the purpose of avoiding escalating violence and "achieve sustainable reconciliation" hoping to establish an "active bystandership". The radio soap has different types of characters, just as in real life, who intermarry, oppose and reconcile. The soap originated in the aftermath of the Rwandese Genocide (1994) and wants to present a realistic image of Rwandese society and the tensions between groups that go with it. Its essential goal is to create empathy between the different groups, to emphasise their common ground rather than their differences. The radio soap has since 2004 reached a 76% listenership among Rwandans every week. [31] This shows that trying out lives through a shared empathy with narratives makes us better people, although we could claim that those who

[31] Source: http://www.musekeweya.org/index.php &
https://www.oxfam.org/en/countries/rwanda/radio-rwanda-soap-opera-heal-community

are more willing to engage empathically will likewise be more willing to engage in narratives.



source: Brown and Novak (2007) http://www.colum.edu/dance-center/PDF_Folder/Impact_Study_Final_Version_full.pdf (p.83)

1.3.8. Ambiguous empathy?

I have researched empathy from an artistic point of view, where impact and ambiguity stand central.
There is a downside to empathy and heroism; feeling for another can blur opinions or perspectives and can lead to uncritical mirroring, which takes us to a challenging path.
"There are clear social sanctions against unbridled self-interest, there are not clear sanctions against altruism. As a result, altruism can at times pose a greater threat to the common good than does egoism." (Batson, 2008)

The discussion on the altruistic nature of empathy regularly sprung up during this research, as it seems possible that one finds self-benefit while empathising; that one achieves personal gain while being altruistic. A possible explanation could be that the inner reward one receives while doing *good* or caring for others can be seen as an egoistic result of being altruistic. As Dunn et al. found that "spending money on others leads to higher happiness than spending money on oneself." concluding that "happiness and giving may operate in a positive feedback loop". The process of giving releases endorphins, leading to a positive feeling, is commonly referred to as *helper's high*.

Batson takes the egoistic versus altruistic discussion to an ideological level claiming that empathy can lead up to actions that transgress the "moral principles of justice". Through empathising with someone we can forget the context, or overreach in our actions. In 1723, Mandeville already pointed out that feelings of empathy do not necessarily lead up to *good* actions but can focus on personal well-being: "There is no merit in saving an innocent babe ready to drop into the fire. The action is neither good nor bad, and what benefit soever the infant received, we only obliged ourselves, for to have seen it fall, and not strove to hinder it, would have caused a pain, which self-preservation compelled us to prevent." (p. 42).

We could of course see things in a more pragmatic way and focus on the final result (regardless whether the action was fuelled by altruism or egoism): Is the child saved? Is the dictator overthrown? Etc. This pragmatic viewpoint can be connected to the classic war-hero who, independently of the inflicted collateral damage, justifies the means by its end. This heroic tunnel – as I would name it - is one of the elements that define a hero, but also blur his or her morality. This tunnel can be a strength and at the same time the weakness of the hero (choosing the one or the other will be crucial to which type of character and genre one creates).

In order to divide altruistic from egoistic actions the crux seems to be the intention or the nature of the motivation. Both egoistic and altruistic based actions can be categorised as empathic but due their intention the *level* or sincerity of the empathy can be discussed. This brings us to the next chapter, where glorification of villains, morality and heroism will be discussed.

Rooting for a MAC (Morally Ambiguous Character) or the villain

> "Empathy and side-taking enforce and strengthen each other until any position can seem justified, including those that are morally wrong."
> (*Empathy and its Limits*, Breithaupt)

A unique branch of empathy towards fictional characters, which will prove to be essential in developing the hybrid hero, is the empathy for anti-heroes, flawed heroes and/or villains. Why do we love such characters? What is it that seduces audiences all over the world and from the very early days of narratives?

Villains seem to have a magnetizing force on their audiences, both in the real world and in fiction. There are different reasons why villains attract us as much –sometimes even more- than heroes. The fact that they challenge the system and behave as they want to, often results in admiration and glorification. Their audiences acknowledge their wrongdoings but nevertheless root for them; it seems that the actions themselves are mostly admired and that the outcome is mostly neglected. According to media scientist Prusa (2016) however, it is not "goodness and badness, but more importantly, the heroic "beyond good and evil," which is the invisible force that maintains socially-integrative, consumerist attitudes", if this would be true it would mean that the mere fact that flawed heroes exist and challenge good and bad is their intrinsic value. It would also mean that classic heroes are too clean for most audiences, as they have lost their willing suspension of disbelief; simply said, classic heroes would then be too good to be true. Could we then say that flawed heroes are more nuanced version of heroes?

We must ask ourselves, why is that we love and these MAC's (Morally Ambiguous Characters). In my opinion, there are two main elements which lead to more or less enjoyment and involvement towards flawed heroes or villains: tolerance and learning process.

Just as there is a *vermögen*, the ability to empathise, there is the ability towards tolerating ambiguity. Budner (1962) described this tolerance of ambiguity as the "tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as sources of threat", this *vermögen* thus leads to more or less comfort when confronted with ambiguity.

This could partially explain why person X is attracted to e.g. Dexter (a traumatised serial killer with his personal moral code) or Frank Underwood (a Machiavellian politician who unleashes the darkest human vices to become president of the US) and person Y feels unease when experiencing narratives with such characters. Or "Ambiguous characters that act in unpredictable ways and that cannot be easily categorized as good or bad may thus cause discomfort for individuals who are less tolerant of ambiguity." (Krakowiak, 2015) and therefore a person with high tolerance of

ambiguity "perceives ambiguous situations/stimuli as desirable, challenging, and interesting and neither denies nor distorts their complexity or incongruity" (Furnham & Ribchester, 1995). Low levels of ambiguity tolerance collate with, among others, idealism, ethical beliefs and personality.

"Over time viewers learn that certain protagonists in certain narratives violate typical moral standards. To enjoy such stories, a viewer must take off the default lens of moral scrutiny and put on one of moral permissiveness and justification. Only with this alternate interpretive lens, which is forged by the process of moral disengagement, can the anti-hero protagonist be loved and the narrative enjoyed." According to Raney and Shafer (2012). This would mean that ambiguous characters can only be interpreted and appreciated after a learning process in which audiences not only learn to cope with such ambiguities but furthermore can "differentiate anti-hero protagonists who are to be loved from other morally corrupt characters who are to be despised" It seems that after a series of encounters with flawed heroes, results in "greater levels of enjoyment and less reliance on moral judgment as a guide for that enjoyment." (Raney and Shafer, 2012).

In general, the success of villains or flawed heroes depends greatly on the idea that audiences can feel as the characters but the without consequences. Perhaps this has a cathartic effect on audience, to feel as the bad guys without being them.

Next to that creators have a tool at hand which can lure audiences into moral disengagement; if the violent actions within the narrative are presented or considered as just, audiences tend to accept them more easily and with less moral objections. Thus, if creators can convince audiences that actions are justified, audiences deny the consequences of those deeds. This means that the motivations and emotions from the fictional character are mirrored within the audience, thus a strong empathic connection can occur. Revenge and self-defence are especially fitted for empathic connection and justifications. (See also: Hartmann, Toz, & Brandon, Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010 Hartmann)

I see different sub-elements that can generate more or less empathy for MAC's or villains:
a) villains challenge the system,
b) they are underdogs (vigilantes),
c) they do things their way, these things are not always allowed by law or moral code,

d) they can use all means they see as necessary,
e) their actions can be framed through the context of the narrative therefore, they are mostly considered as an entertaining guilty pleasure and such feelings are stimulated because of the idea that,
f) fiction is a safe and harmless environment.

Challenge the system
Just as their counterparts, anti-heroes counter and challenge the system. This leads to a rapport of similarity between audience and anti-hero. This attitude of rebelling not only mirrors concrete situations and feelings of the audience it furthermore is a tool to attract attention and involvement. (e.g. *Dexter* challenges the system as he evolves into a vigilante who kills those villains that can evade justice.)

Underdog
Audiences typically root for the underdog, the one who will have drop height, who risks his or her position in society, who tries, to achieve a goal, even if the odds seem nearly impossible. However, underdogs must, at the same time, deliver to their audiences in order to keep their attention and benevolence. (e.g. the characters in series as *Carnivale* or *Twin Peaks*). Audiences root for underdogs because they hope or expect he will turn out to be the hero (Kim et al., 2008).

Their way
Flawed heroes are complex and not *clean*. This state is similar to that of the audience. The fact that they are unpredictable and have vices brings them, perhaps paradoxically, closer to us.
Next to acting according to what they see fit and necessary, they have things their way. This sort of freedom is attractive to many; audiences can feel envious witnessing so much persistence. That their actions are often in the grey zone of common and moral law, makes them even more daring and thus attractive. (e.g. the character Walter White (*Breaking Bad*) who cooks and sells meth to provide for his family - Walter White is a teacher diagnosed with cancer who takes audiences along his downward spiral from cancer patient to drug lord).

All means
Heroes can use all means necessary to achieve the goal. Due to the pressure of achieving the goal, heroes can lose themselves in a Machiavellian tunnel where collateral damage and the need to achieve the goals are swapped. Heroes have the ability to generate success but sometimes that success comes at a high price for others (the opponents or those who do not belong to the community). Heroes can ignore or whitewash their actions in retrospect as necessary evil to achieve the goal, by doing so they evade

responsibility, it is this *freedom* that attracts many. (See also: Zimbardo, 2007).

Framing and Guilty pleasure
Creators can frame the narrative in such a manner that the actions seem appropriate, and justified. This can be done by providing a specific background and by avoiding other viewpoints. Paradoxically, the heroic actions seem to be based on altruism - but of course only for the chosen community.
Next to that, framing allows audiences to know more about the flawed hero than about other characters, which are often portrayed as even worse than the flawed hero. E.g. Vic Macky in *The Shield*, audiences experience the domestic side of the rude and cruel police agent who - as Walter White - tries to provide for his family and thus tries to whitewash his actions by claiming that although it may be ambiguous, he keeps the street safer than before. (See also: Magaldi, 2015, Saporito, 2016)
Goethals (2015) concluded that audiences perceive characters "in a more extreme fashion, because they are typically less complicated, and of course are drawn favorably. But fictional villains are seen as worse than real ones."

Safe entertainment and Guilty pleasure
Although they may disturb or be disruptive the narratives will in most cases be seen as a guilty pleasure, as safe entertainment (e.g. the behaviour of Frank Underwood in, *House of Cards*, may be disturbing, audience still can claim they are merely watching entertainment).
Because of the alleged harmlessness audiences are willing to accept higher levels of ambiguous and wrong behaviour. Since it is not real there, no harm can be done.
(It seems audiences change their opinions on the effect of narratives and art depending on their *want* and the narrative. Both basic concepts are used interchangeably: Some narratives must be take serious as they hold moral lessons while others must not be taken serious as they seem to be created to answer Dionysian needs.)

1.3.9. The effect on creators

It is widely believed that creators are more empathic than others. Since I could not accept this thesis (as I believe that creators are not biologically equipped to be more empathic but are more trained - due to their work practice - to discuss and refine their comments and opinions on emotions and feeling *as* another) we started with neurological tests. We measured - through EEG scans - the levels of arousal and involvement while watching different movie clips that are chosen on their ability to evoke emotions with testing persons. The results of these tests showed that, indeed, creators did

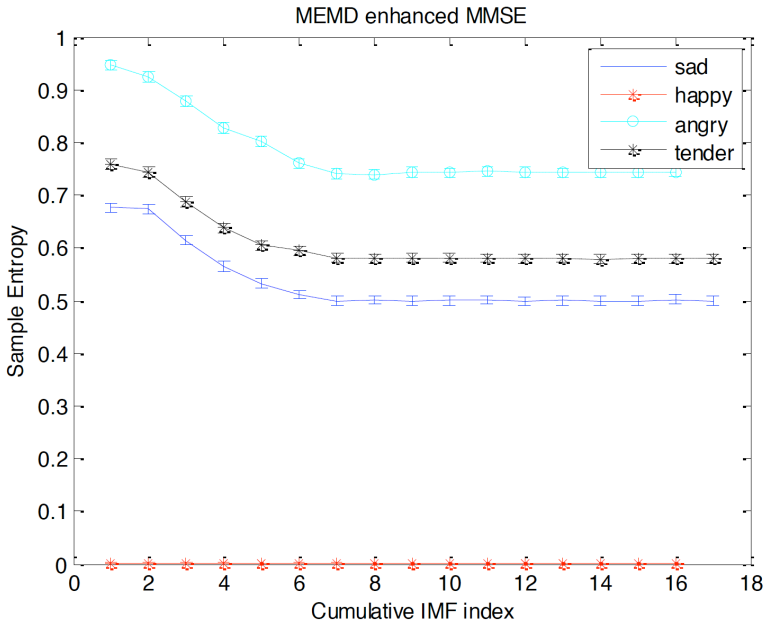
not *feel more* than non-creators (see for example my personal EEG, showing no difference with EEG's from non-creative business).

Goldstein et al. (2010) came to similar results when they tested whether performers were more skilled than non-performers in Theory of Mind. Goldstein et.al. worked intensively on the correlation between empathy and performers, claiming that "actors do no excel in empathy … while actors show and perceive a wide variety of emotions on stage, they may do so without actually *feeling* as these emotions".

Taylor et al. (2003) on the other hand did find proof that authors scored higher on empathy than the norm, specifically for fantasy and empathy taking, but Taylor et al. assume that these higher levels of empathy could be the result of the cultivation and training writers undergo through their work – this would be another proof that empathy can be trained. Taylor et al. (2003) conclude that writers are more empathic with their characters apart from themselves as if the characters in the narrative are in a sense independent.
I, from my part have had the same experience: if the writing goes well it feels as if it was written by itself, sometimes I even must re-read the pages to know exactly what I wrote. Although I *feel* the emotions I wrote, the exact words or idiom happens almost by itself.

Authors need to empathise with monsters, as in the Borgia trilogy, whereby I had to defend their actions and beliefs in order to write words. This process was re-done by the performers who had to *leave* their own set of paradigms and ideologies in order to *be* and defend the character. In this sense, we were *able* to both identify and empathise with the characters and to discuss, rehearse how we were going to try and share the empathy with our audiences.

When discussing the Paradox of Diderot, I will argue that theatre authors when writing dialogue, over-empathise with the characters they create. In this sense writing dialogues equals becoming the other, thus also becoming a MAC or a villain. (see also, Van Tourhout, 2017)



Summarizing

This chapter was intended to discuss empathy from an artistic viewpoint and as a step towards the development of hybrid heroes. I hope to have shown that empathy is less innocent then lay concepts assume, that heroes are dancing with empathy as they want if from audiences and need it themselves to answer, "the call to adventure" (Campbell, 2008).

Empathy within fiction can come with a high price, as audiences can gloat and empathise with ambiguous characters, actions and moralities they would oppose to outside the *safe* fiction.
These elements are my playground and the fact that empathy, narratives and heroes do have *ambiguous* possibilities makes them, for me, irresistible.

"Comrade, I didn't want to kill you. …
you were only an idea to me before, an abstraction that lived in my mind
and called forth its appropriate response. It was this abstraction I stabbed.
But now, for the first time, I see you are a man like me. …
We always see it too late. …
Forgive me, comrade: how could you be my enemy?"
(*All quiet from the Western Front*, Remarque)

1.4. Chapter 4: Morality, Empathy & Heroism

"The stage is, more than any other public institution,
a school of practical wisdom, a guide to our daily lives,
an infallible key to the most secret accesses of the human soul."
(*Theater Considered as A Moral Institution*, Schiller)

"It would be unjust, and moreover Utopian, for Shakespeare to direct the shoemakers' union.
But it would be equally disastrous for the shoemakers' union to ignore Shakespeare.
Shakespeare without the shoemaker serves as an excuse for tyranny.
The shoemaker without Shakespeare is absorbed by tyranny
when he does not contribute to its propagation."
(*The Rebel*, Camus)

"We leave the theatre vowing to reconsider our entire existence in light of the values shown on screen, and to purge ourselves of our decadence and haste. And yet by the following evening, after a day of meetings and aggravations, our cinematic experience is well on its way towards obliteration."
(*Religion for Atheists*, Alain de Botton)

"Storytelling is an exploration; it's not about making statements. We have no statement.
There's no agenda to the show."
(*House of Cards* creator, Beau Willimon)

"The goal of our performance today is to move the people in their hearts, to give them the motivation to get politically engaged again."
(Political Performer, Catalina Lopez)

First things first, I am not a philosopher.[32]
Therefore, this chapter will not so much propose philosophical paradigms but rather speak on morality within narratives. Heroes are not only connected with empathy but also - perhaps even more - with moral choices and ideals. At the end of this chapter I propose a model of four elements that, in my opinion, steer the moral impact of narratives on audiences. Narratives can hold, or can at least reveal, the moral beliefs of their creators. Whether such moral beliefs are intended depends on the creator and whether they have any effect on audiences, is still a much-discussed topic as

[32] Therefore, I will not speak of e.g. Nietzschean heroism and its effects in narratives in this text as I hope to work on this and similar topics in the future.

it seems that - just as the attribution of heroes - the moral impact lies within the beholder (van Ommen et al. 2016).
I will add empathy for fictional heroes as an element to the discussion: Is empathy a lubricant for moral impact?

I see three reasons to include a chapter on morality.
First, within my work, just as with many other creators, morality forms an essential reason to create in the first place. Through a play or a text, we want to show or prove something to our audiences. That is why many creators develop (consciously or not) a premise; a moral tagline they want to explore with their narrative (e.g. Being greedy leads to loneliness, envying others leads to racism). Although it often does, a premise does not need to follow a commonly accepted morality (e.g. Being tolerant leads to loss of identity, Being unforgiving leads to strong leadership, etc.)
Secondly, creators have often searched - and will presumable keep on searching - the borders of what is commonly accepted; creators are searching impact whether or not through eye-openers, scandals etc. and thus creators risk moral judgement, sometimes even punishment. Alfred Polgar wrote, after seeing the tumultuous opening night of *The Rise and Fall of The City of Mahagonny* by Brecht and Weill: "Theatre scandals are tremendously stimulating. It's good to see people ready to come to blows over the theoretical questions which art brings up - or throws down - and getting so worked up that they're besides themselves." (Polkar quoted in Blackadder, 2003, p. ix)
Thirdly, because I believe that morality lies at the basis of heroism; in my opinion morality is that special ingredient which divides *stunts* from *heroism*. Coming into action without a form of moral reflection can be heroic in itself but it is the moral framework that leads to the development of a hero (therefore I, for instance, do not consider athletes as heroes although their efforts and achievements may be heroic).

This chapter, together with the previous ones, leads to the development of the hybrid hero in the next chapter.

The ambiguous status of the hero (Chapter 2), the empathy he or she evokes (Chapter 3) based on moral frameworks (Chapter 4) are the three stepping stones on which I build my hybrid hero model (Chapter 5).

1.4.1. Set-up

Raymond and Oatley (2008) explain that fictional heroes are perceived "more definitely good or bad then their real-world counterparts" and that "fictional villains were also rated more extremely then real-world villains", since narratives are an "abstraction, simplification, and compression" of situations which, "facilitate the understanding of others who are different from ourselves and can augment our capacity for empathy and social inference." I tend to believe that morality can play an essential part both in creating and perceiving narratives, although their values do not necessarily lie in the moral residue (but in its opposite as we will see with the hybrid hero).

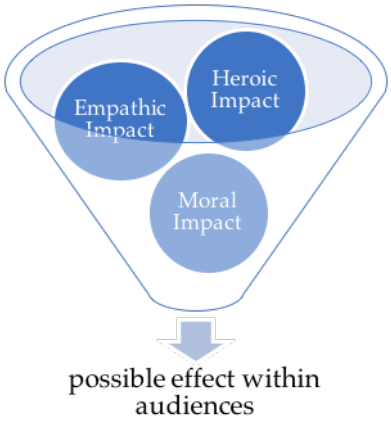
The narratives that are most easily linked to morality are children's stories, they often follow commonly accepted moral and opinions on *good* and *bad*. According to, social philosopher, de Valk (2009) most of these stories are constructed to explain "human relations" and "social hierarchy" as they bring values to the table with a "reassuring message: the world is good." (2009). Most Superheroes narratives follow similar patterns, the character of Superman may be the strongest defender of common moral as with every episode of the television series audiences were reminded that Superman was fighting for "truth, justice and the American way." [33]

Basically, the discussion on morality in the arts falls apart in two conflicting opinions: one believes that art has a (permanent) moral impact, the other believes that, although there is empathy occurs with the characters, no (long-lasting) effect will occur.
Historian Lynn Hunt (2000) claims that the development and growing popularity of novels in the 18th century "disseminated a new psychology and a new social and political order" (Hunt quoted by Sanford, 2002) and later adding that "readers of novels learned to extend their purview of empathy. In reading, they empathised across traditional social boundaries between nobles and commoners, masters and servants, men and women" (Hunt, 2007, p. 40) while psychologists Lockwood and Kunda (1997) claim that audiences will follow exemplary leaders: "Individuals will be enhanced and inspired by a superstar if they believe that they too can attain comparable success but will be demoralized and deflated if they believe that they cannot."
Both ideas reveal an interesting element; narratives can influence audience on moral levels but the connection is personal and is based on (perceived) similarity. This not only explains the pro and contra in this matter but

[33] Since 2011, DC Comics has replaced the words "American Way", as Superman renounces his U.S. citizenship because he is "tired of having my actions construed as instruments of U.S. policy." (Source: http://Stanislawski.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/apr/28/superman-suddenly-shuns-the-american-way/?page=all)

furthermore that this impact is –just as the (empathic) rapport with heroes- fluid. It seems that, although empathy is not necessary needed to generate moral impact within audiences, it sure it is a facilitating and helping lubricant in many cases.

This means that heroism, empathy and the moral impact are uncertain and dynamic factors. This may sound as an easy fix for everything (it all depends on who you are and what you feel and think within a specific time and spatial context), but on the contrary; just because of these variables we should be enthusiastic every time moral empathy happens during or after an encounter with fictional characters in narratives. If one looks at matters in this sense it is almost miraculous that narratives do have impact as the chances can be as slim as within the Great Filter theory. [34]



Many creators, including myself, search impact on three levels: heroic, empathic and moral. That these elements are fluid, leaves both creators and audiences with minor chances of the notorious *life changing* narratives – which of course make them, if occurring, all the more valuable.

Although Flaubert wrote: "Your imagination confuses itself with the characters, and it seems as if it were your own heart beating inside their clothes.", we must acknowledge that fiction does not necessarily makes us better people, even after millennia of narratives. And despite the numerous efforts by propaganda machines it is still unclear whether and to what extent narratives truly influence on ideological levels (in the case of propaganda we can assume that both fear and the will to survive play a role into *accepting* the moral lessons from the narratives).
Nussbaum and others believe that narratives lead to changes but that claim could as easily be a generalisation based on personal experiences and/or wishful thinking. Besides, from an artistic point of view one can ask questions on the instrumental usage of art e.g. Nussbaum (1995) and de Botton (2012, 8). How well intended it may be, the fact that the arts are

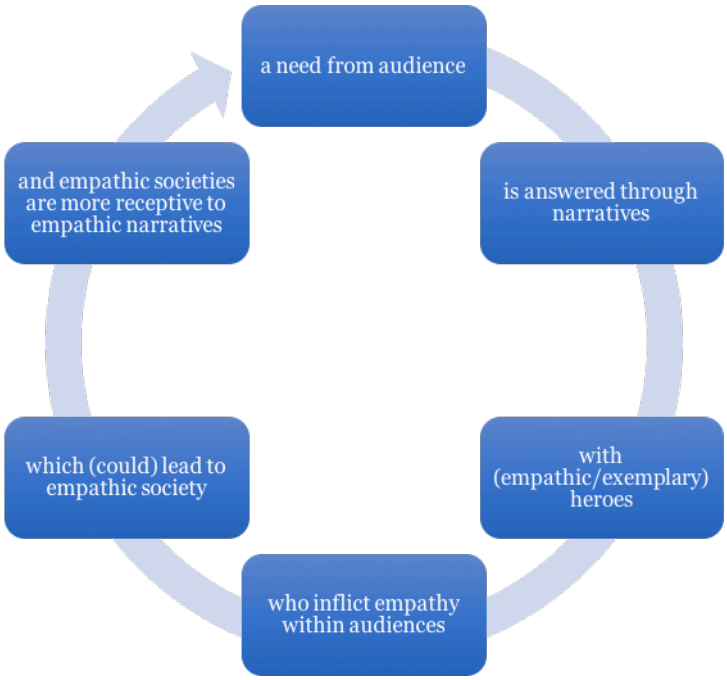
[34] The great filter theory originates within the work of Robin Hanson (1998) who tries to explain why -until today- we still have not found any signs of life outside planet earth. The idea claims that there are so many filters (time, space, distance, size and number of galaxies, …) that different life forms have almost zero chances of meeting. For a visual explanation of the Great Filter Theory, see Hawking (2016, 45'12"-49'30").

merely seen as instrument does feel a bit patronizing as de Botton claims that "the art world would benefit from a more intensive collaboration between thinkers and imaginers, so that the best ideas could be expressed in the most impressive way." [35]

It is, however, impossible to deny that interactions with fiction do move in various ways and that this, in its own turn, has led to reflection on narratives and its empathic effects.
Such effects may not, in my opinion, overshadow the sheer enjoyment of the emotional and aesthetical encounter and experience of art and narratives. The value of art lies, in my opinion, not in sharing moral concepts; the moral residue of art and narratives is not its core but a unique and valuable sequitur.
I compare this moral residue with homeopathy; a small drop of morality in a narrative does change the texture of the narrative but whether that is enough to be actually beneficial, remains a fierce discussion with believers and non-believers. In this matter, I tend to follow de Graeff (2002) and Hakemulder (2000) who claim that the empathic response with narratives in itself is not enough to speak of moral impact, there is whole range of other causal factors (both in and out of the specific narrative) that whether or not lead to a change.

Basically stated, we can say that heroic narratives can concretise abstract moral paradigms, give labels as e.g. being good or bad or can present possible effect and consequences of the actions.
Societies are in *need* of narratives which explain, contextualise, give meaning to the world and its (tragic) events and circumstances while authors *want* to create heroes who inflict empathy (which then may or may not - influence society) and answer the *needs* from audiences. This on-going process is a self-supporting system based on the changing need of audiences, the want of creators and the alleged moral impact narratives may have on societies.
It seems that stressed societies are more vulnerable to classic war-hero figures or characters that hold some heroic features (being brave, (only) caring for the community, etc.). (See also: 9/11 as catalyst for hybrid heroes, Chapter 5).
I have drawn a hypothesis on the reciprocal liaison between society's need and creator's want in a *cycle of empathy*.

[35] My translation from Dutch (p. 232-233).



In between: In this matter, it is interesting to bring Freud (1987: 656-657) to the discussion as he clearly believes in the beneficial effects of identification with fictional characters and therefore praises both playwrights and performers as they present a "Scheinwelt" whereby the spectator "wants to be a hero, if only for a limited time, and playwrights and actors make it possible for him through identification with a hero".
If audiences, would indeed, want to be as the characters then narratives would not only serve as a moral mirror but would furthermore provide a temporary escape from the self.

This chapter consists of three subchapters as I will:
a) give a summarised overview of the scientific research (from psychology and sociology) on the moral impact of fiction,
b) discuss some opinions philosophers formulated on the arts then (Plato/Aristotle) and now (Nussbaum/Keen),
c) discuss creators' impact on audiences.

1.4.2. What science says

I return time and time again to science, not because I understand it all so perfectly well but because psychologists or sociologists are not involved in the artistic process nor in its presentation, they observe what happens with those who are taking part.
(Without claiming to be exhaustive I will focus on some research projects that were essential in developing the hybrid hero as they helped me to clarify and determine the impact of narratives.)

Liking is Agreeing?
I will limit myself to those scientific results that where important for this research and the development of the hybrid hero. (See appendix B, for more information, research results and contextualisation.)

Zillmann and Cantor (1972, 1995) developed the Affective Dispositional Theory (ADT) whereby *liking* and *caring* are essential to accepting the hero and his or her actions and (moral) beliefs. ADT can be rudimentary summarised as the relation between the moral judgement of the audiences and the moral presented by the fictional characters. The ADT theory works on the correlation between the spectators' beliefs and those of the fictional characters. ADT can be seen as a modern-day version of what Aristotle stated in his *Poetica* (when claiming that in the end, villains should be punished and heroes be rewarded). This process of (dis)liking leads, according to Zillmann and Cantor, to empathy or counter-empathy. [36]
Since *liking* was essential to *agreeing* it became clear to me that the form of the character helped to accepting its moral behaviour, that form is a lubricant to propose moral concepts. This made clear why audiences can go along with villains like Richard III or in my case Gilles de Rais or Rodrigo Borgia, eventough they may oppose in the moral sense. The *cool* and heroic factor of a villain is a tool to inflict empathy and moral acceptance.
Later Zillmann and Bryant (1994) claimed that: "[Audience] enjoyment is high when characters who are liked experience positive outcomes" and "characters who are disliked experience negative outcomes", this also resembles the cathartic effects of Aristotle.

Raney and Bryant (2002) added that enjoyment depends on the "degree of correspondence between the viewer's sense of justice and the statement

[36] The ADT (Affective Disposition Theory) conceived by Zillmann and Cantor works on three basic emotional reactions leading to enjoyment: a) the liking of a character (determined by approval of the characters' behaviour and motivation, b) characters evoke the anticipatory hopes and fears (based on the expectation that virtuous characters will rewarded while vicious characters will be punished) and, c) the ultimate outcome renders pleasure and enjoyment (if the expected justice is similar to the justice outcome in the narrative).

about justice made in the drama." (p. 407), concluding that the closer the correlation, the higher the level of enjoyment will be. This means that creators could come up with narratives that "maximize enjoyment" (p. 409). Thus, Raney and Bryant come to two toxic conclusions: audiences will praise those narratives that confirm their beliefs and because of that there is a more or less clear formula for audience involvement. This is a dangerous assumption even if it does increase enjoyment; it would bring us to an art that *gives what audiences want* and lead the way to effective propaganda (every dictator's wet dream). The arts, would in that case, would no longer be a reflector but the slave of audiences' wishes. (See also: Raney 2002, 2004, 2011).
(Next to that, I believe, that not knowing how audiences can be attracted is an essential part of the development of every creator, if creating would be nothing more than a predefined route then neither creator nor audiences would be surprised. Searching the unknown is the oxygen of the arts.)

Tal-Or and Cohen (2010) focussed on how such audience involvement manifested itself and saw two elements: the audience is at the same time "external observer" and "participant" (p. 403). This duality explains why audiences can engage with e.g. villainous narratives without strong identification as action, suspense and/or affect predominates the emotional rapport (in e.g. action movies, thrillers, detective stories). Next to that, Tal-Or and Cohen found new evidence that background and contextualisation influenced audience involvement.

The above brings me to conclude that:
a) Similarity between audience beliefs and those of the hero,
b) a fictional background and contextualisation and,
c) a heroic form which triggers affect will lead to higher moral agreement and justification.
The opinions *on* the hero have less effect than the actions and form *of* the hero (even though the actions themselves may feel as ambiguous). (See also: Marinescu et. al., 2014)

Moral implications?
Psychologist Bruner (1990) used the word *Perfink* to pinpoint the different layers of communication with fictional characters stemming from the words: *Per*ceive, *F*eel and Th*ink* (p. 93). Philologist Nunning (2015), claims that fiction "leaves traces in reader's minds and influences their cognitive abilities", due to the persuasive power of (untrue) fiction and the subsequent improvement in understanding the self and others.

In 2012 Shafer and Raney came up with new insights on narrative enjoyment and approval. They asked themselves whether the process of liking, agreeing and empathising was limited to heroes.
A surprising result came from the empirical research conducted on the enjoyment and approval of *Jack Bauer*, the protagonist in the TV-series *24*. They found out that fan enjoyment increased (as expected) in relation to feelings of sympathy towards Bauer. However, they (unexpectedly) found that enjoyment increased the more *un*attractive and *im*moral the fans rated Bauer. Thus, "fan enjoyment increased the less attractive, the less moral, but the more sympathetic they found the protagonist" Shafer and Raney , 2012, p. 1031). These findings not only are contradicting the ADT theory but seem highly illogical, as enjoyment and moral approval have been seen as each other's preconditions.
Shafer and Raney believe that this new form of attributing counter-enjoyment is only possible after a learning process. This would mean that engaging with villains, flawed heroes (or hybrid heroes for that matter) is something that must be developed within audiences. Shafer and Raney believe that it is reasonable to believe that we "use moral disengagement strategies to maintain positive dispositions towards our narrative friend" (See also: Raney and Janicke, 2011).

Recently, Eden and Daalmans (2016) came to similar conclusions whereby the conflicted morality of narratives could lead to more reflective processes. Simply stated: the more we like the immoral characters, the more we are willing to reflect on the content of the narrative (and the way in which it is told).

This last concept not only felt refreshing but was important as it explained the complex but fascinating discussion which emerges when audiences are confronted with multi-layered characters as the hybrid hero. I believe that heroes reap what they saw: if they are complex they will receive complex reception while clear-cut heroes will be evaluated on a more binary like/dislike basis.

This brings me to conclude that audiences have learned to enjoy moral flaw and have accepted that the forbidden fruit is an essential part of that enjoyment. Enjoying the wrong is enjoyable because:
a) it is not commonly *allowed*,
b) the protagonist is liked and admired because of shared wrong ethics,
c) the behaviour and motives are seen with positive bias, and
d) the wrong actions are whitewashed in retrospect.

There is, thus, reason to accept that identification and empathic bonds with fictional characters not only render pleasure and enjoyment but that it also

can promote and moral reflection as after-effect (the power and length of such after-effects is still to be researched).
Although empathy is commonly considered as being a good thing we must acknowledge that the impact of fiction on audiences can (just as easily) inflict empathy or positive bias to *wrong* ideologies.
Empathy is not morally selective; it is a tool, a lubricant and not the content.

(further reading could include the work of Bryant, Hakemulder, Goldstein, Oatley, Tamborini, Zillmann, etc.)

Conclusion:
Observation a) There is a correlation between the moral judgement of the spectator/reader and the moral actions and beliefs of the fictional character; both moral schemes must find common ground.

Observation b) We agree with what we like, thus audiences agree with those fictional characters they like. This means that audiences are ready to adapt their moral paradigms in order to like the fictional characters.

Characters that are likeable have the ability to c) temporarily change the moral codes of spectators and audiences, so that they can enjoy the narrative encounter. Creators can create fictional characters that challenge the morality of their audiences because they are likeable.

1.4.3. Philosophers on Art

"A hero is someone who has given
his or her life to something bigger than oneself."
(Joseph Campbell)

Whilst it is not my purpose nor the scoop of this research to re-open the fascinating debate on philosophy and art, I cannot evade this topic altogether.
I would like to point out that creators, in most cases, not so much *do* philosophy but rather focus on moral values and ethics within their work; it is this element of narrating that holds much interest to philosophers, creators and audiences.

Plato and Aristotle have done groundwork regarding empathy with fiction and moral effects. Whilst Plato banned fiction from his ideal republic as he feared the empathic (emotional transportation) rapport between audience and fiction, Aristotle saw fiction as an instructive tool. Both are convinced of the *power* of narratives; but where Plato fears this power, Aristotle glorifies

it. Nussbaum (1990, 1995, 1997) and Keen (2007) are redoing this discussion in our times with more or less similar arguments.
But why would a philosopher be afraid of the arts, as being afraid of something is acknowledging its powers. (Isn't that what every artist dreams of: being able to scare the philosophers of his time?)

Plato

Plato sees different reasons to ban fiction, strangely enough most of his arguments still spice up the discussion today: Knowledge (authors lack knowledge and thus spread false information, e.g. Homers descriptions in the Iliad), Capacity (authors exaggerate human capacity leading to fact-fiction reversals), Reproduction and Confusion (the realities in fiction make it impossible to see right from wrong in the real world), Compassion (both the performers and audiences suffer as they believe the fictional lies and therefore will live unhappily in reality), Bad examples (the glorification of villains which has "power to corrupt, with rare exceptions, even the better sort is surely the chief cause for alarm" (*The Republic*, 10605,d) or why "suffer our children to listen to any chance stories fashioned by any chance teachers and so to take into their minds opinions for the most part contrary to those that we shall think it desirable for them to hold when they are grown up?" (*The Republic*, p 377b).
Many elements still ring a bell today: false truths, fake news, bad examples, lack of knowledge or denial of proof, the impact of media on youngsters, etc. are all elements which return with every new medium or platform (TV, games, binge-watching, social media, …)

Plato acknowledges the powerful impact theatre can have on its audiences, because the performers can "overwhelm its spectators with their own emotions and encourage them to imagine that human identity might be unstable or changeable" (Ridout, 2009, p. 17). The danger would then be that, if audiences are caught in empathy and sympathy, they would lose track of the moral choices and ethical frameworks.
Brecht and others proclaimed similar ideas on the effects of emotions. The *Verfremdungs*-effects came into play exactly to alienate audiences from the emotional rapport. Perhaps Brecht and Plato would have agreed that *distance* has more ethical impact than emotional mirroring. Therefore, Plato wants to ban the tragic theatre because it is "fundamentally hostile to human needs and values and irreconcilable with a positive moral significance" (Halliwell, 2002, p. 109).

In this light, an element to elaborate Plato's point: the identification with the character by the author and the performer. While preparing a paper for the much-valuated colleagues of the University of Freiburg (SFB 948) it all of the sudden struck me that authors need to over-empathise with characters of all

kinds, from saints to monsters as Rodrigo Borgia. I had to defend him in order to write his dialogues, this goes further than empathising with someone. The paradox of Diderot (see below) is not applicable for authors as one cannot hold distance when writing dialogue (this is different when writing novels where authors can choose to keep more or less distance with their characters).

The discussion whether a performer should or should not *be* the character, has been on the foreground since Diderot presented us his *Paradoxe sur le Comédien* (1883). The discussion, rudimentary stated, comes down to choosing between the Diderot Technique or the Stanislawski/Strasberg Method. Or put simply: does the actor find the emotional base for his character within himself or does the actor need to become a character outside himself, thus develop empathy for something/someone other than himself.
Does the actor empathise with the character up to the level of identification or does the actor empathise on a more personal scale (whereby the performer searches similarities within his or her own life, and tries to imagine the probability of likewise personal situations rather than that of the character)?
Since Diderot, intense discussions have arisen concerning empathy versus acting. This led to changes in how acting was perceived: where once the actor was mainly viewed as data transmitter, with more or less emotional virtuoso, acting soon became meta.
The artistic team became a decisive factor in the creative process. The uniqueness of the individual actor and his choices became central, particularly with the rise of Modernism and Brechtian theatre. Since then, empathy has no longer been limited to the narrative and the identification by audiences, but the empathic liaison was used as a way to communicate on ethics and on the act of theatre itself.

Regardless of how enriching the *Paradoxe* may be for actors, it sadly has no use when writing dialogues, one cannot choose to remain outside the character (dialogues would not be genuine and only meta-writing would exist). Authors must overcome their own personal opinions in order to develop empathy with villains and their, sometimes, despicable viewpoints. They have to "perfink" (Bruner, 1990) as the character in order to put words into the character's mouth, even if it is the devil himself. The empathy between character and author is completely reciprocal and can be described as a doublure as they are one and the same person (during the writing process). Therefore, the act of writing dialogue comes, in my opinion, the closest to being someone else leading to an empathic maximum or over-identification.

Because of the dialectic nature of dialogue, authors can proclaim opinions they oppose to in order to attack them. I believe that, if one does not actively engage in the other or not genuinely defends the wrong, the right itself will not stand out through the spoken words.
Author Tsiolkas (2008) said on the matter "As a writer you take on aspects of your characters and if you are not careful the world you are creating begins to blend with the world you actually inhabit".

Fiction author Gandolfo (2014), claims that "There is substantial research demonstrating the therapeutic benefits of writing about one's own traumas. But what are the challenges of writing fiction that requires imagining and creating traumatic events; evil, monstrous or tragic characters … experience in sensory and emotional detail, and they [the written events] become real and merge with our real memories. The alchemy that you hope will move your audiences must first move you, so perhaps you end up having more than your fair share of emotion" or as media specialist and former speechwriter Richardson (2013) claims: "Perhaps writing is never without cost, its productive potential always containing the capacity to change the body that writes in new and dangerous ways" (p. 161).

In between: Performers have similar issues when performing strong (villainous) characters, if they decide to identify with the character and think as the other (the Stanislawski-Strasberg Method) one gradually evolves into the other, the character. Often, a performer is confronted only with this identification process once the performance is over and one meets persons who do not take part in the fictional world.
How to cope with the fact that performers take their character with them after performance is a common conversation among performers. One actor told me that after every performance of the Borgia trilogy, he got into a fight with his girlfriend. While another told me, she became deeply saddened after performing.

Aristotle
Aristotle had a much more positive view on the impact of theatre and narrative, he gave authors the first writing course in which he discussed the still much used dramatic three-act structure.
Next to that, the emotional experience within audiences was essential according to Aristotle as he believed that audiences should experience fear and pity whilst watching the performance (thus, while Plato avoided empathy and emotional transportation with fictional characters, Aristotle actively searched ways to attract empathy). Such effects on audiences must, according to Aristotle, culminate in the catharsis (the cleansing and liberating effect).

Aristotle saw possibilities to instruct morality with fiction; he used heroes as concrete examples of what he believed was good or wrong and by rewarding or punishing them in the final act he presented his audience a moral rule, a lesson.

With Plato and Aristotle, the basis outline for theatre & the ethics is layed out. From then on there exists a constant battle between Ratio and Emotion or in other words between Reflection and Experience, between denouncing or embracing the empathy and moral effects of fiction.

A famous example of a narrative which evoked fear is the *War of the Worlds*-radio show by Orson Welles in 1938. Due to the dramatic tension, the pre-World War II context and the subsequent fact-fiction reversal, a narrative succeeded in rendering affect (in this case confusion and panic).

The catharsis as Aristotle intended it was not part of our Borgia performance. Instead I wanted audiences to be *woken* up and start to reflect on why they loved Rodrigo Borgia, a character they presumably would oppose to in real life.
This cold shower-effect had impact on audiences but it was only when we tried to regain audiences back into the story and thus invited audiences to start empathising with the Borgia all over again that the complicit and dirty ways of narrating became clear.
From then on, spectators had to choose whether they accepted or denounced the fictional Borgia, either way the moral reflection was an essential part in their reception and its effects were (often passionately) discussed after the performance.

In this sense, we doubled the meta effect, the first meta layer (one could even say Verfremdungs-effect) was to step out of the play, literally break the fourth wall and ask audiences what and why they liked the Borgia family. The second meta layer, then, was to go back in the story – thus with the knowledge of the first meta layer - and start the whole fictionalisation - process again.
This deranged effect which can be seen as the opposite of the cleansing effects of catharsis, brought the audience, perhaps paradoxically, emotionally closer to the characters; they chose to ignore certain elements as they chose empathy over moral reflection.

Fig. 22: The Borgia Trilogy - Part III, Homo Solo
© Bram Vandeveire – NUNC

Nussbaum/Keen/Booth

Nussbaum defends the idea that a series of empathic encounters with arts and/or narratives will make us *better* people; that audiences will evolve into more caring, altruistic and moral humans because of the empathic rapport.

This belief can be seen in the emphasis education places on reading or attending performances in a school context.

Students are encouraged to read and engage themselves in narratives, as reading books is still considered as beneficial for the reader and his future.
The *National Endowment for the Arts* (Iyengar et al., 2007) came to stunning conclusions on the correlation between reading and prospects for the individual and society as a whole. They made the possible toxic conclusion that "prisoners continued to score significantly lower than non-incarcerated Americans" and while not explicitly linking those two factors (being in prison and readings skills) a correlation emerges.
More in general Iyengar et al., stated that: "Literary readers are well over three times as likely as non-readers to visit art museums and attend plays or musicals or classical or jazz concerts. … literary readers are significantly more likely than non-readers to play sports or attend amateur or professional sporting events" and that "Good readers, and not only literary ones, enjoy this privilege of understanding and appreciating the outlook of others while enlarging their own identity. Perhaps because of this active empathy, they contribute in measurable ways to civic and social improvements." (Iyengar et al., 2007, p. 67, 87-90)
The concept of "enlarging one's identity" through a fictional encounter sounds appealing to me, fiction allows audiences to experience other lives and situations which not only can help them empathise with such situations but moreover gives audiences a set of experiences (albeit a fictional one).

Till today, there is much debate going on whether empathy has the ability to morally transform the audiences: English linguist Keen (2007) opposes to the idea that arts or narratives can change someone while philosopher Nussbaum is perhaps the best-known defender of the idea that through the encounter with narratives one gradually evolves into a better person, she believes that "certain novels are, irreplaceably, works of moral philosophy … the novel can be a paradigm of moral activity" (1990, p. 148), that a narrative "cultivates a certain kind of responsiveness to another's need, and understands the way circumstances shape those needs, while respecting separateness and privacy" (1997, p. 90), and that "It is impossible to care about the characters (of Dickens and Eliot) and their well-being in the way the text invites, without having some very definite political and moral interests awakened in one-self" (ibid, p. 140). Nussbaum, however, admits that "sympathy inspired by literary imagining does not immediately effect political change" (ibid, p. 97).

In this light, we came across a fascinating project that was set up in four federal prisons in Brazil, where inmates had the chance to reduce their sentences by reading literature: "Inmates will be offered the chance to read up to twelve works of literature per year in exchange for four days off their sentence for every book read - lightening their sentences by a total of up to 48 days per year." According to Lawyer Kehdi (in Paramagura, 2012), who strongly believes in "reading for redemption", the inmates "will leave a better person".Of course, both the materials and the readiness of the readers play an important role in such research. Independent of the results the fact that the Brazilian department of Justice wants to try to read for redemption proves that there is a widespread belief of the beneficial impact of narratives.

Cicero strongly believed in heroic narratives as instructive instrument as he believed the lives of heroes could teach moral lessons: "To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?" (1939). Based on the same belief Nussbaum proclaimed "certain novels are, irreplaceably, works of moral philosophy. … [That] the novel can be a paradigm of moral activity." (1990, p. 148).
This idea, how appealing it may sound, easily falls in the trap of overstretching a personal connection with a work of art as a universal one. Rather than looking for reasons and/or techniques Nussbaum and others cherry-pick those works that inspired them. By doing so a distorted picture of heroes, empathy or the impact of narratives emerges. This instrumental usage of fiction is what de Graef defines as "hermeneutic violence" (2002).

Keen challenges Nussbaum and dismisses the idea that empathy has long-lasting positive effects (as e.g. take action as the fictional hero does). Next to that we must ask ourselves whether every message in fiction is worth of mirroring in reality and whether *teaching* audiences is something creators must focus on. Although Keen forces us to reflect on the matter, her fierce denial seems an overstatement and just as Nussbaum she seems to fall victim to overstretching her personal opinions on empathy and narratives (which, according to Keen, are only valuable when the respondent comes into action). Keen (2007) dismisses the idea that empathy has long-lasting positive effects, claiming that "We should not assume that character identification, mediated by video, film, or novels leads directly to empathy, altruism, and a commitment to human rights" (p. 20). Next to that, it seems that - just as the attribution of heroes - the acceptance of morality also lies in the eye of the beholder: "The extent to which a morally ambiguous story is interpreted as morally uncertain is in the eye of the beholder, and may suggest shared moral decision-making processes, … moral principles, even though their moral subculture and standards may be intensely different, were rigidly upheld in both viewer groups in their moral evaluations." (van Ommen et al., 2016)

I, from my part, see the hybrid hero as a character that challenges both Nussbaum (the hybrid hero does not present clear-cut instructional moral philosophy) and Keen (the hybrid hero challenges the alleged ineffectiveness of empathy). (See also: Chapter 5)

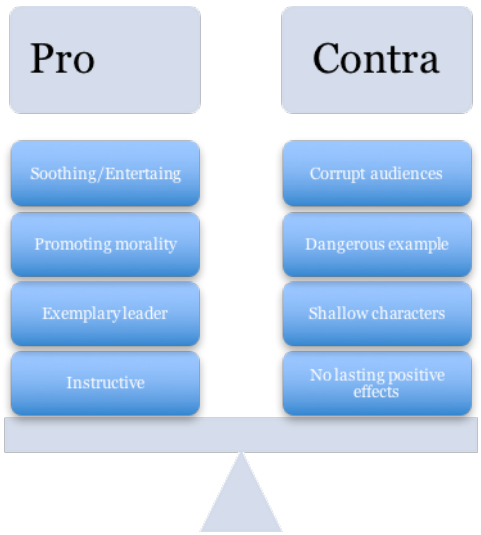
We should ask ourselves whether the arts are supposed to encourage physical action and we should reflect on how to respond to the examples of fictional narratives that did trigger their society in the moral sense (e.g. *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life among the Lowly* (Stowe), *Oliver Twist* (Dickens), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Harper Lee), *La Muette de Portici* (Auber/Scribe).

What most researchers in this on-going discussion seem to leave out of the equitation is the fact that neither fictional heroes, empathy or narratives are clear cut, that altruism and egoism can switch sides, that doing *good* can turn out to be *bad*, and that narratives search for effects. Next to that, surprisingly, the intention of the creator is not often taken into account.

In between: Elderkin and Berthoud (2013) from the School of Life (founded by Alain de Botton) came up with Bibliotherapy, whereby they recommend books as a cure for emotional and physical pain. In their introduction, the authors state that: "The effectiveness of fiction as the purest and best form of bibliotherapy is based on our own experience with patients and bolstered by an avalanche of anecdotal evidence. … novels have the power to transport you into another existence, and see the world

from a different point of view. … All will offer the temporary relief of your symptoms due to the power of literature to distract and transport."

1.4.4. Pro and contra concerning the moral impact of narratives?



There are however researchers who seek to combine both elements as Booth and Pinker have done. Both worked on the *try-out* idea, whereby they assume that audiences - through the encounter with narratives - are able to *live in* lives of others, to look at matters with another perspective. Pinker stated that fiction gives "cognitive advantages of seeing how hypothetical scenarios play out" and "emotional pleasures of empathising with a character" (Pinker and Goldstein, 2004, p. 97).

Booth (1988, p. 485), from his part, said that trying out through narratives "offer a both relative freedom from consequence and, in their sheer multiplicity, a rich supply of antidotes. In a month of reading, I can try-out more "lives" than I can test in a lifetime" and because of that "we try-out each new pattern of desire against those that we have found surviving past reflections, and we then decide, in an explicit or implicit act of ethical criticism, that this new pattern is or is not an improvement over what we have previously decided to desire". (See also: Chapter 3)

The try-out allows audiences to test-drive certain actions and outcomes; through identification and empathy certain moralities and their effects could be tried out. Schiller (in Sigerson & Chambless, 2002) wrote that "The stage is, more than any other public institution, a school of practical wisdom, a guide to our daily lives, an infallible key to the most secret accesses of the human soul."

The ethics and behaviour of heroes?

The behaviour of heroes and their ideology fuels discussions on how *good* and *usable* heroes are. The glorification of heroes makes us suspicious and the empathy that can grow with these ambivalent characters is feared. The concept and appreciation of heroes is a fluid process fuelled by the context, in recent times (post 9/11) we saw a massive production of heroes, it seems the pendulum has shifted once again.

An essential uniqueness of fictional heroes lies in their ability to combine philosophical and entertaining features. Heroes can offer an ethical horizon, hold up a mirror (which can evolve into a hammer) and because of that can be the sum of a philosophical and gripping narrative. Heroic narratives can be the concrete translation of ideological or philosophical paradigms (this is exactly what Nussbaum claims in her defence of narratives). The hero tries out and bears out the consequences of certain choices and because of that can shed a concrete light on our time and context. This combination of virtues, philosophy and actions is what Carlyle (1959) pointed at when speaking about the hero as prophet, poet, priest or a man of letters. Carlyle clearly challenges the idea of a war-hero with physical powers or strength on the battlefield but sees heroism on a whole other level: as inspirational tool. Kinsella et. al. (2015) use *inspiration* as one of their prototypical features of heroes.

Philosophers and linguists as Nussbaum or Booth praised narratives because of their practical and situational presentation and their possible outcomes of moral dilemmas.

Graham et al. (2008) see two different modi operandi: the *individualising moralities,* which focus on the extension and protection of individual rights, and *binding moralities*, which focus on the promotion and protection of social groups and institutions. The context in which heroes, and their goals emerge, will thus determine which morality the hero uses (in order to attract attention from audiences). This leads to an "unfortunate side-effect" because "heroes who buck social norms and customs "to do the right thing" are frequently shunned and even denounced as traitors." (Jayawickreme and Di Stefano, 2010).

Colby and Damon (1992) conducted in-depth case studies of 23 real life heroes and tried to see which virtues were central.[37] The most relevant finding, for our purposes, is that these *moral* heroes did not seem to consider their actions as heroic precisely because they identified so closely with the moral value. "The exemplars have done so without devaluing their own

[37] Colby and Damon chose peope they label as heroes, those persons came from all over the United States, some were educated, well-known while others were helping others and seldom stepped into the frontlight.

personal goals. Nor do they disregard their own fulfilment or self-development, nor, broadly construed, their own self-interests. They do not seek martyrdom. Rather than denying the self, they define it with a moral centre. "(p. 300).

This brings me to conclude that heroes do not *choose* to act in a moral way, but that morality is a key part of their identity. [38] Or as Brown (1965) claimed there is a difference between moral thoughts and moral behaviour, this could be the difference between a hero and its audience (both have moral thoughts but only within heroes such thoughts evolve into behaviour?)
This leaves us with two types of moral heroes that can be created in narratives: the one mainly acting due to a situational need, the other mainly due to a moral paradigm. We could also speak of transactional and transformational heroes (Bass, 1990) whereby the first acts based on a situation (e.g. Rodrigo Borgia) and the latter on a moral based scheme (e.g. Gandhi, Martin Luther King). Both the action and morality are linked together and cannot be seen separately, but it is the trigger to act which is different; hence the division between transactional and transformational heroes. The action itself can be the same, but the initial reason to act is different
It brought Archer and Ridge (2015) to conclude that "moral heroes would not have been making a sacrifice in the seemingly relevant sense of making themselves worse off in acting as they did. In fact, they would have been making a sacrifice if they had acted otherwise!" and "moral heroes do exhibit very real and exceptional moral depth in their identification with the relevant moral values, they also typically get so carried away by their enthusiasm for those values that they fail to recognize their own very real sacrifices".

Whether one acts based upon moral or situational needs, the risk of not achieving the goal always lurks. On top of that the possible collateral damage of such actions renders:
a) drop height,
b) vulnerability for fictional heroes, and
c) the opportunity to try-out moral and situational reasoning for audiences.
This leads to a dramatic tension between hero and audience (but only if audiences can connect or counter-enjoy with the morality)

The above brings us naturally to the discussion whether heroes act to develop or to maintain their personal status or whether they act for the benefit of others. From an evolutionary standpoint Krebs (2009) wrote that

[38] This differs from supererogatory actions where the hero feels obliged to act because of the situation, and thus not necessarily for moral reasons.

"moral virtues have evolved in humans" because "moral virtues are attractive to potential mates".
Within creations however, it is the artistic team that can decide whether the hero focuses on the self or on the other and whether the goal is to become a hero or do heroic deeds.
Sorensen (2004, p.468-470) presents us a fascinating series of paradoxes on moral worth and heroes. I mention them here not with the purpose of solving the paradoxes but in the hope, they can stimulate further reflection on the matter:
-Strength: It can be bad to want a good thing *too much*: desiring to be good gets in the way of being good when the desire is particularly strong.
-Singularity: I can be bad to want a good thing when this is the only thing one wants, for there are other good things, too.
-Ambition: It can be bad to want *too much* of a good thing: desiring to be *too* good gets in the way of being good.
-Manner: It can be good to go for something good in the wrong *way*. Trying to be good through the wrong means, or in the wrong manner, can get in the way of being good.

These paradoxes can become tools in heroic narratives when using Ofmans Core Quadrant, see Part II)

Conclusion
The ongoing discussion whether art does change a person, whether it can change the world is one that, for me, is not so relevant. What I do care about is the knowledge that narratives can transport audiences, can generate empathy, allow audiences to forget themselves and engage themselves totally with the fictional characters and circumstances.
The fictional hero can propose a moral scheme and outcome, whether this moral message gets picked up by audiences is, I believe, not the responsibility of creators.
Such moralities wrapped in narratives do not need to follow the instrumental wish of philosophers as Nussbaum and de Botton. It seems that they forget why they were transported in the first place.
heroic empathy is a personal rapport, expecting that moral impact will come from that heroic empathy is something we can strive for but should not take for granted nor deny.
In my opinion, moral messaging should be the sequitur of the narrative and not vice versa.

In my opinion, no universal truths in this matter. The fact that every member of the audience makes his or her ultra-personal opinions based on preferences and embedded in a space and time context is the essence of the artistic practice. If we would claim that there is a work of art that has this or that effect then we would either live in a dictatorial regime or the arts would be dead since the secret to create would have been found. The similarity between the feelings of the hero and those of the audience create a rapport between them, even a *complicité*. Heroes are not the "innocent bystanders" but transgress and participate (Hofmann, 2000, p. 4), the same could be said from audiences.

1.4.5. Creators' Impact on audiences

"The purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to *nature*: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."
(*Hamlet,* Shakespeare*)*

"We willingly enter the world of fiction because the scepticism to which our adult sophistication condemns us is wearying:
we long for safe places – a love we can entirely trust, a truth we can entirely believe. Fiction meets that need precisely because we know it to be false."
(*Lost in a book*, Victor Nell)

Raising awareness for phenomena, defending underdogs in society, attacking political leaders etc. all are moral elements one sees regularly in the arts/theatre. Recent times led to a series of plays about terrorism or being a refugee; the Berlin based Gorki theatre even started an *Exile Ensemble*. [39]
Art which behaves as an instructional *teacher* is a widespread motivation to both create and attend performances, although the clear-cut moral, as Aristotle saw fit, has since the rise of post-modernism gradually been abandoned. Instead an ambiguous morality saw light which invites audiences to take part in the reflection process and to create or determine their own conclusions.

Creators have all sort of reasons to create but often the wish to *instruct* lies at the base. The connection between morality and art has become a very organic one, at least for most creators. Performance artist Abramović (2012) claims that "The entire aim of my work is to elevate the human spirit." Or as director Johan Simons repeatedly claimed: "Theatre must shock and wake

[39] Source: http://www.gorki.de/en/exile-ensemble

up." (in Van de Perre, 2015) and "Without art, society dries out." (in van den Berg, 2014)
It seems that most creators not only believe that their art should be stuffed with morality but furthermore see it as the primary reason of its existence. In the past, such ideas would have been denounced and/or embraced as the relation between morality and artists has swung back and forth from the Greek tragedies over morality plays in the Middle Ages to the *l'art pour l'art* ideology in the 19th century.

The sweat of artists?
Research revealed that the image of the passionate, poor artist not only holds appeal but furthermore forms an unexpected empathic link between audience and the work of art: "Because of our own experiences of being an underdog and frequent exposure to cultural narratives of underdogs, we easily recognize, identify, and sympathize with the struggles of an underdog." according to Kim et.al. (2008). The legends that surround Michelangelo, the vast oeuvre of Shakespeare or the tragic faith of Van Gogh all help to raise the artistic appreciation. Among others, Jan Fabre actively plays with the transparent struggle of both performers and audiences in *The power of theatrical madness* or *Mount Olympus* which lasts 24 hours. [40]
The merit for virtuosity and craft was brutally challenged in modern times when e.g. Duchamp labelled an *urinoir* as art, naming it *The Fountain* (1917). Duchamp and his counterparts stirred up the discussion on craft, on representation and on previous definitions of art. Duchamp shifted the attention towards the interpretation of audiences claiming that: "The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act." (1973, p. 140) Thus, the viewer (or attributor) became the measure of things. This idea was built on the *L'art pour L'art* concept of *Parnassism* (a literary movement formed in the second half of the 19th°century) who rejected the idea that art had to have moral intentions but strove–at pure form and beauty. Baudelaire summarised the *L'art pour L'art*-idea in his *Drames et les romans honnêtes* (1857)**: "***L'art est-il utile? Oui. Pourquoi? Parce qu'il est l'art*."

Artists as instrumental philosophers?
Narratives can serve as a practical philosophy where the consequences and different options are played out in front of audiences. Next to that, many philosophers have chosen narratives (even the form of dialogue) as a mean to explain their philosophy.

Both philosophers and creators can make use of dilemma's as a tool to describe the difficult and sheer impossible choices one must make. The

[40] http://mountolympus.be/

consequences such decisions have on the characters and its surroundings can be seen as what Booth refers to as a "try-out". Sophocles presents Antigone (ca. 411BC.) with a dilemma between choosing sides with her dead brother or with the living Kreon. Philosopher Kant (1949) describes us a story of a murderer who asks whether his intended victim is at home, leading to the problem of whether one should lie or tell the truth in this matter (Kant believes one should always tell the truth no matter the consequences.)
A dilemma will often be used as an act-break in narratives and will change the position of the hero (higher/lower status) and the appreciation of the audience (more/less appreciation and empathy).
Next to that dilemmas invite audiences to empathise, to ask themselves what they would or should do if they were in the shoes of the character in that specific situation.
That dilemmas can trap characters becomes tragically clear in *Sophie's choice* (Styron, 1979) whereby a mother must decide over the life of one of her children, a cruel actualisation of the Salomon's Judgement.
Dilemmas are a tool to attract empathy through moral questions with high potential for dramatic drop height and emotional involvement and partaking of audiences.

One can deduce different narrative dilemmas: choose between two immoral actions, between law (external morality) and personal morality emotions, decide over live or death.

On a broader scale narratives serve as a tool to put things into perspective, to console, to explain and to nurture certain values. The Greek myths are written to entertain and to impress but at least as important is their instructional function. These myths are not composed by accident but were written with clear moral intentions; although they are not afraid to show us the vices, the dark and ambiguous sides of both gods and men. The same darkness combined with morality can be found in the original fairy tales. [41]
Many creators have a *want*, a desire to inject their narratives with morality, as they want to prove, illustrate or reveal certain phenomena. Some creators will playfully hide or mystify their moral intentions while others speak bluntly on their beliefs. In order to develop a rapport with an audience the *want* from creators must coincide with the *need* of audiences. This explains why certain moral injections as the works of Dario Fo (1926-2016) are effective during a certain context.

[41] An interesting re-write of *Sleeping Beauty* was made by Primo Levi as *La bella addormentata nel frigo* (1966).

Being morally off guard-Fourth wall

Being morally off guard is one of the *tricks* narratives can play with both audiences and creators; if the context, the features and the overall attractiveness of a narrative coincide it can lead to a status of being morally off guard (Shafer and Raney, 2012). This means that the story blurs our moral compass because the form of the narrative itself is alluring, breath-taking and makes audiences admire the actions.

We tried to generate such an off-guard audience with the Borgia trilogy, whereby the humour and audacity of the Borgia family overshadowed their true actions. The form of a narrative can thus lead to a moral numbness.

Although audiences know that what they see is not *true*, that it is a performed false truth, audiences often seem to be more open, readier to go along with that falseness (or: Perhaps just because of its falseness?). It resembles the fun of being cheated by a magician. Moreover, just because audiences know that what is happening in front of them is not actually happening but merely *play*, going along with malicious or ambiguous characters feels harmless, as an entertaining interplay between audiences and character.

> "Actors must use their emotion regulation skills - whether they decide they want to feel the emotions of a character or not. … This is actually no different from what doctors, teachers, or salesmen must do. All must put on a "public face." …
> For the actor, his or her "public face" can be anything from murderous to purely innocent.
> (*What, Cognitively, Does an Actor Actually Do?*, Goldstein)

Within the performing arts, the physical contact between audience and performance is essential and has profound impact on the experience, the empathy and the possible moral reflections. Theatre happens in front of a live audience, this is the essence of experiencing a play. This reality is for both audience and performers a tangible one; they hear, see (possibly even smell) each other. Both act in their own world with their own realities. An often-overlooked impact factor is the synergy within a group of performers and audiences (coughing, smelling, laughing, texting, complaining).

The live act is not limited to the live performance but also the live act of light, sound, sets, props and according to Gilbertson (2012, p. 28) the awareness "that accidents can happen during a live performance". The sum of these live-elements improves the tight relation and the togetherness which de Botton refers to in *Religion for Atheists* (2011) as being an essential asset of theatre in contemporary times.

Helms (2012) sees an active role for audiences in the process of sense-making: "Though spectators may seem to do nothing more than take their seats and attend to the business onstage, their minds are always busy,

blending together their perceptions, empathic simulations, and sociohistorical knowledge to flesh out the world of a drama" (p. 93). Helms proposes an interesting thesis which conflicts with the suspension of disbelief as he claims that "theatre can function not because spectators suspend their disbelief but because they can blend the artifice of theatre into fiction to create the world of the story." (p. 91) going further that "Actors risk themselves for the audience, tearing down social and psychological barriers and appearing exposed and vulnerable. Spectators risk themselves for their own sakes. The threat of exposure isn't public; it's personal" (p. 96).

Not every performer or character automatically triggers empathy or moral reflection (although I believe that empathy is not a precursor for moral reflection). Discussions on which actor did what and why, on the quality of this or that actor or director, etc. have filled foyers all over the world ever since they were built. Next to that comes the discussion whether narratives and their interpreters can leave moral traces in audiences.
Whether a narrative *works* depends on the quality of the narrative and the performer but also on the timing and context of the encounter (e.g. you will probably experience narratives differently if you recently lost your mother than when you are newly married), some characters, scenes, dialogues will *enter* your system in a different way before or after events (e.g. the Brexit, refugee crisis).

On more profane levels, one can like/dislike a performer because he or she was liked/disliked in a previous performance, TV-show, commercial or a talk show. And let us not forget the physical attraction performers have on their audiences (it is not for nothing that performers are often used as the face of a commercial product). Krakowiak (2015) describes this unpredictable attraction: "A character's physical appearance, demeanour, and background or past actions can also result in ambiguity if they do not correspond in predictable ways. For example, characters that are perceived to be more physically attractive are judged to be better and nicer than less attractive characters."

The audience is often considered as a group who responds more or less similar, but in reality, the audience is a vibrating entity which together decides how a narrative and its hero will be evaluated. Vessel et al. (2012) wrote "Observers have strong aesthetic reactions to very different sets of images, and are moved by particular images for very different reasons. Yet the ability to be aesthetically moved appears to be universal. … Aesthetic experience involves the integration of neurally separable sensory and

emotional reactions in a manner linked with their personal relevance." This could explain why certain works of art have the ability to be universal, to move people over independently from concrete time and spatial contexts.

A research project conducted by Budelmann et al. (Audience Reactions to Greek and Shakespearean Tragedy, 2013) found proof that characters who had monologues and/or more text than other characters were more likely to receive moral approval, this would mean that contextualisation and the number of words are decisive in implementing moral frameworks: "Edmund [*King Lear*] is the only character in our scenes who is given a soliloquy – and thus a direct route to the audience even as he articulates a plot they may find morally repugnant. And Creon's [*Antigone*] first speech, while not formally a soliloquy, is a long set piece that allows him to present himself to the audience before having to share the stage on even terms in dialogue." This straightforward conclusion feels so logical that it is hard to find counter arguments. Another conclusion from this research project is, in my opinion, even more shocking: "We found very little statistically significant variation between the audiences' responses to the same character in the two performances. In other words, the massive and tangible changes we commissioned and observed in performance seemed to have almost no impact on the audience's response to the characters. Lear stayed Lear, Cordelia stayed Cordelia, Creon stayed Creon: the deep-embedded elements of character trumped the vagaries of performance and direction. The texts seemed director-proof." If it would indeed be true that the author of the play is in fact the essential communicator then theatre directing should be addressed in a whole other and new way.

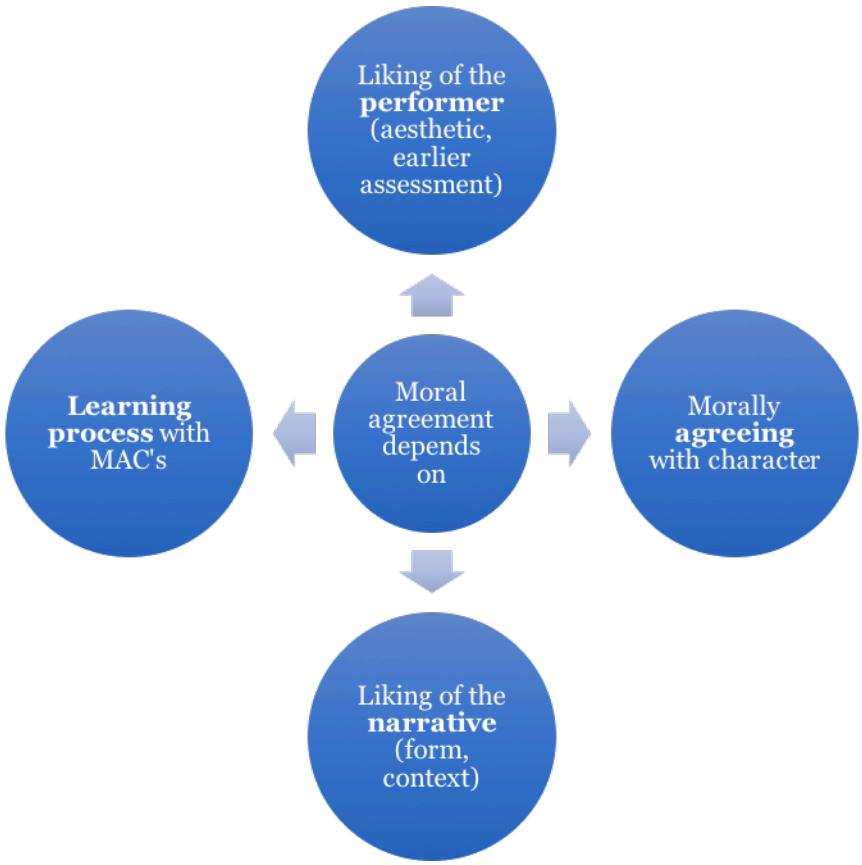
A final element I want to add is the similarity between audience and MACs (Morally Ambiguous Characters). (See also: Chapter 3). Both audiences and MACs can have flaws and vices, it led Sanders and Vogel to conclude that: "Although MACs are morally questionable and complex in their motivations and outcomes, they are, perhaps, more likely to induce perspective taking, empathy, and less moral sanctioning of behaviors due to heightened perceptions of authenticity, as compared to the archetypical hero or villain. … Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that systematic processing occurs more readily for characters who possess a blend of both good and bad traits or whose immoral actions can be justified with good intentions or outcomes." MACs are seen as more realistic and therefore can feel as closer to audiences than the *clean* hero or the *mean* villain, this ambiguous status will prove to be an asset (see, Chapter 5: Hybrid hero.)

Summary:

I propose a model, based upon the moral engagement of audiences, on liking of the performer and narrative, on the intrinsic moral agreement and the learning process MACs demand.

The justification, the favourable perception and consequent agreeing with a fictional character stems, in my opinion, from the accordance and the similarity between the opinions of the character and those of the spectators. This then can be combined with a more or less *attractive* narrative form and the appearance of the performer(s).

These different elements influence whether audiences accept the moral (and behaviour) of the character.



(Further research must be conducted on this matter - See also: the work of Boerner, Brown, Eversmann, Foreman-Wernet, Radbourne, Walmsey, etc. [42])

Further reading could include: MAR-lab (research project led by Raymond A. Mar at York University. http://www.yorku.ca/mar/index.html), *On Fiction* (an actively maintained website on the effects of narrative empathy)

[42] Walmsley B. (2013) "A big part of my life": A qualitative study of the impact of theater. Arts Marketing: An International Journal 3(1): 73–87.

1.5. Chapter 5: The heroic cycle towards the Hybrid Hero

From Classic Hero over Anti-Hero to Hybrid Hero.

> "If the actions and motivations are perceived to be moral and good,
> individuals will form favorable attitudes toward the character.
> If, on the other hand, the actions and motivations
> are perceived to be immoral,
> the character will be disliked."
> (Zillmann in Krakowiak, 2008)

> "Readers' empathy for situations depicted in fiction may be enhanced by
> chance relevance to particular historical, economic, cultural, or social
> circumstances,
> either in the moment of first publication or in later times,
> fortuitously anticipated or prophetically foreseen by the novelist."
> (*Narrative* Empathy, Keen)

So far
Chapter 1 spoke of two case studies: *The Borgia Trilogy* and *Each One Alone*.
Chapter 2 spoke of the ambiguous status of heroes.
Chapter 3 spoke of different forms of empathy with fiction that one can develop.
Chapter 4 spoke of moral effects of heroic narratives on is audiences.

These are the stepping stones to develop a contemporary interpretation of heroism: The hybrid hero
In this chapter, all the previous chapters come together: the ambiguous heroic behaviour and subsequent ambiguous empathy from audiences, the audiences' responses on moral levels, the motivation from creators and the impact of narratives on audiences (from identifying to glorifying wrongdoings).

All these elements are the building blocks for what I have defined as the counter-exemplary hybrid hero. [43] This hybrid hero is a contemporary interpretation of heroism in fiction, these hybrid heroes are actively searching empathy (rather than sympathy) and thus creators actively use and develop narrative tools to lure audiences into *loving what they would normally hate* through fiction.

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[43] The label hybrid hero draws partially from Bakhtin who describes hybridisation as "a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor" (1981, p. 358). According to Guignery (2011, p. 20)) "The encounters and mixtures triggered off by hybrid processes open up new perspectives on the world and result in artistic forms which can combine different styles, languages, modes and genres."

The impact of narratives on audiences has been discussed fiercely and the opinions have pended between all forms of pro and contra. We already saw how Plato feared the impact on audiences; the same fear dominated the French Romanticism (as the authorities feared narratives would instruct and arouse the readers, especially the female reader, see Hunt) while the English Victorian period saw art and especially literature as a valuable stimulation for moral behaviour.

The *need* of audiences relates to the currents in society and is thus connected with a space and time context. There seems to be a correlation between the well-feeling of society and its interest for heroic narratives. Since 9/11 a renewed interest for heroes of all kinds this has occurred (Hassler-Forest, 2011). Therefore, I see 9/11 as the symbolic date fictional heroes took their place back on the foreground - since Lyotard (1984) declared the meta-narratives (or meta-arches) as obsolete and ineffective. (See also: Moïsi, 2016)
I agree with Žižek who said that how "cruel and indifferent as it may sound, we should also, now more than ever, bear in mind that the actual effect of these bombings is much more symbolic than real." (2003)
Just as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the 9/11 attacks, I believe, marked a symbolic paradigm shift (especially in its aftermath) or as Melnick (2009, p. 15) said: "9/11 has become the most important question and answer shaping American cultural discussions.

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Fig. 23: Raissonez © Bram Vandeveire – NUNC

> "We also have to work, though, sort of the dark side, if you will. We've got to spend time in the shadows in the intelligence world. A lot of what needs to be done here will have to be done quietly, without any discussion, using sources and methods that are available to our intelligence agencies...
> That's the world these folks operate in, and so it's going to be vital for us to use any means at our disposal, basically, to achieve our objective."
> (Meet the Pres, NBC, 16 September 2001, Dick Cheney)

> "It's true that 24 struck a chord in that post-9/11 period. It channelled our collective id, our deepest, darkest urges. Caught up in the story, we wanted Bauer to, say, sever the head of the villain with a hacksaw. But that is not necessarily what we wanted from our governments."
> (*The Guardian*, Jonathan Freedman)

In this light, I see a cycle in how creators respond to fundamental or tragic events and circumstances in reality. [«] It seems that different types of fictional heroes are developed over time as a response to cope with such events. Already in 1976 Todorov and Berrong claimed that "Genres communicate with the society in which they flourish by means of institutionalization. … each era has its own system of genres, which is in relation with the dominant ideology, etc. Genres, like any other institution, reveal the constitutive traits of the society to which they belong." and going further "a society chooses and codifies the acts that most closely correspond to its ideology; this is why the existence of certain genres in a society and their absence in another reveal a central ideology, and enable us to establish it with considerable certainty." (163-164). This would mean that a specific set of ideological paradigms, more or less direct, regulates the creation of certain narratives. In a way, such correlation between art and society should not surprise us since artists are in search for impact and because of that, artists often try to evoke reactions, reflections within their audiences and thus will develop those narratives that render as much impact as possible within their audience. Next to that creators often choose to reflect on events, changes in their society and use their artworks as the mean to do that.

The first hero to occur in a crisis will be most likely a classic war-hero (a heroic figure who serves and protects his community with nobleness and strength as his central features, one who fights and protects his community. War-heroes can be warriors themselves or be a leader, king, captain of a group of warriors). This war-hero is one of the best-known heroic types and

[«] See also: Van Tourhout, B. (2017). The Hybrid Hero, a contagious counterexample. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, Special Issue: Heroism and the Human Experience*.

can be traced back to epic narratives as the *Iliad* or *Gilgamesh*. Contemporary examples can be found in superheroes like Superman. Such war-heroes are constructed to sooth and comfort audiences; they are responding to an emotional tension and anxiety in society.

Later, the heroic face can evolve into - what I label as - the flawed hero. I chose flawed to evade vague and much debated terms like anti-hero, Byronic hero, and so on. [45]Such flawed heroes still can focus on serving and protecting the community but dare to use other questionable (and dirty) means. Although the focus can still be on the well-being of the community, the personal needs of the hero play a more prominent role (vanity, pride, egoism, etc.). Examples can be found in Odysseus, Reynard the Fox, or Dirty Harry. Flawed heroes take a step back, they choose another perspective, they comment on the events, in this sense, they differ from the war-hero. "The 'flawed hero' is nothing new in concept. Hundreds of years ago Shakespeare wrote about Hamlet and Lady Macbeth, two pretty wretched stars of their own story. In the 1950s, J.D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield was the voice of an entire generation of Americans. Television explored the idea of the anti-hero as early as the 1970s (Archie Bunker wasn't a great guy), but truly blew things out of the water following the combined success of Tony Soprano, Dexter Morgan, and Walter White. Those characters managed to break the cultural mold so powerfully that every network jumped on board with anti-heroes in attempt to keep up." (Saporito, 2016)

Since 9/11, a contemporary heroic model emerged and took its place in the cycle, the *hybrid hero*: a character that challenges both audience and creators on empathic, moral, and narrative levels. This hybrid hero, or counterexample, is a fluid symbiosis of heroic and villainous features and is the contemporary interpretation of these character types (and their classic concepts), e.g. TV Series as House of Cards.

Moïsi (2016), among others, claimed that with 9/11 "The tone [in narratives] became darker, the heroes darker. … It is not the Good that triumphs at the end, as was the case in the aftermath of the Second World War, it may just as well be Evil." (p. 28) and asks the question: "How can we not yield to the temptation to put forward heroes who are in harmony with the new times: dark heroes, if not intrinsically evil?" (p. 35-36).

[45] The *Byronic hero* is defined as: A man alluringly dark, mysterious, and moody and the *Anti-hero* as: A central character in a story, film, or drama who lacks conventional heroic attributes (*Source*. OED).

Thane Rosenbaum asked, in an emotional way, how art and creators could respond to such dramatic events: "Is there a proper role for the artist, and specifically the novelist, at this time in our nation's history? Can we make art in a time of atrocity? Does the imagination have anything to say when it has to compete with the actual horror of collapsing skyscraper??" (2004, p. 130), it seems the fictional hybrid hero has tried to answer both Moïsi and Rosenbaum.

The hybrid hero is neither a hero nor a villain, he or she is a species that consists of both classic archetypes and thus has heroic features like being strong, determined, brave, courageous, and villainous features like egoism, vanity, ruthlessness, non-caring/non-empathic. The hybrid hero is thus the sum of the classic war-hero, the flawed hero and the villain.

This combination brings us to a character that ferociously challenges the *rules* of heroism and its impact on audiences. This leaves creators with possibilities to lure and seduce audiences, to *play* with ambiguous empathy, to present a world where ethical uncertainty and/or moral confusion is exactly what creators are aiming for.

The hybrid hero differs, in my opinion, from the flawed hero for two reasons: character development and empathic effect. The hybrid hero may start his ambiguous mission with a genuine and acceptable reason, but during the narrative the hybrid hero will gradually evolve into a villain, yet due to the initial reason and the charm audiences will remain loyal. Well-known examples of flawed heroes as e.g. dr. House, Dirty Harry differ from hybrid heroes as their moral paradigm does not shift altogether in the course of the narrative, they may often cross lines of acceptable violence or torture but the reason they do such *wrong* actions is to render good results. Hybrid heroes on the other hand willingly lose track of the moral goal and evolve *heroically* into *villainous* actions.

Secondly, the hybrid hero is more likely to receive empathic reactions compared to the flawed hero. An example to clarify: Both Macbeth and Richard III are well-known flawed heroes (most audiences gloat while watching them) but when they, in the final act, loose everything and everyone most members of the audience will not feel empathy (at best sympathy).
While most audiences did feel empathic when at the end of Season 3 of *House of Cards* hybrid hero Frank Underwood was confronted with Claire (his side-kick, compatriot and sometimes even mentor) saying: "I'm leaving you." This came as an emotional shock, one whereby audiences forgot who and what Francis Underwood stood for and what he had done. The same process was used in the Borgia Trilogy; due to the loyal audience empathy (rather than sympathy) with the hybrid hero occurs.

Others have written on today's heroes and concluded that the prevalent traits are "a mixture of hero and villain characterized by moral ambiguity" (Garcia 2016, p. 53), which according to Keller (2015, p. 114) reveals "the popularity and charisma of villainy and evil. Even at his most despicable, Frank Underwood retains the sympathy and support of the audience."
Hybrid heroes act for their own personal *good*, while flawed heroes act for the *greater* good and accept to do *wrong* in order to achieve that. Both the *flawed* and *hybrid hero*es are ready to live with that burden and could answer this dilemma, as "in this world, with great power there must also come – great responsibility" to use Stan Lee's and Ditko's famous words (1962, p. 16).

Enjoyment of hybrid morality
The enjoyment of traditional heroes seems to differ from that of flawed heroes (and hybrid heroes) as, according to Shafer and Raney (2012) enjoyment with non-traditional heroes requires "the development of story schemas over time" and such schemas lead to "differences in the way enjoyment is derived". (p. 1028). Next to that Gierzynski et al. saw "recent trends in popular entertainment media that have bucked the tendency to promote a belief in a just world, stories whose plot lines instead show an unrelentingly cruel and unjust world." (Gierzynski et al, 2015: 5).

Lott (1997) already pointed out that flawed heroes are acting in ambiguous ways and cannot be strictly labelled as hero or villain (as we will see the hybrid hero draws further on this ambiguity and uses it as an asset).
Anti-heroes can act out of revenge, have flaws, are tragic but their *wrongness* is contextualised and their behaviour has in many cases justifiable reasons (Buck, 1986).
Anti-heroes, and especially hybrid heroes, challenge the punish-reward concept by Aristotle and the ADT theory of Zillmann (whereby the hero is ultimately victorious and the villain defeated).
The hybrid hero searches ambiguous ways to seduce audiences since "viewers are able to separate the anti-hero's morally questionable actions from their feeling towards him (p. 1034).
When combining these theses with the work of Tal-Or and Cohen (2011) we can claim that the liking of the ambiguous character works on identification (understanding, simulating the position) and that morality works on transportation (the narrative as a whole).

Perhaps even more important is the presumption that habituation and a series of experiences influence both the moral approval and the enjoyment. The moral, thus, gets modified due to exposure. Raney and Janicke (2011, p. 1036) found that previous exposure of violence leads to justification as the

participants "found the ever-increasing violent acts presented in the stimulus material to be significantly more justified (i.e., moral) than their no-exposure counterparts."
This would mean that exposure to violence and moral ambiguous conduct not only creates higher tolerance but even a gradual approval. Furthermore, the study showed that "anti-hero liking was clearly not bound to moral evaluations" and that "those familiar with an anti-hero, video-game narrative enjoyed a new iteration of the storyline, despite increasingly violent and unjustifiable actions by the protagonist … negative moral evaluations … did not hamper enjoyment." (ibid, p. 1037).

Although this feels disturbing, in my opinion, it makes sense: enjoyment is linked to the liking of the protagonist, and ADT states that we positively evaluate the actions and motives of protagonists if they correspond with our motives, therefore spectators *must* "find ways to like the protagonist, despite their sins. … moral considerations would apparently need to decrease in their importance as a character's morality becomes more complex." (ibid, p. 1037).
It is exactly this complexity, in combination with the *need* to like protagonist that will become central in hybrid heroism.

In between: Another asset of narrative is their length and scale; in recent times, more and more TV-series are broadcasted over several seasons, a growing number of novels are serialized (the Borgia trilogy lasted 5h, which gave audiences the change to spend much time in the presence of the Borgia family). The length allows audiences to spend longer time *with* the characters but gives creators the chance to develop more complex storylines and options to contextualize, glorify the (ambiguous) actions of the characters.

"I have dirty hands. Right up to the elbows.
I've plunged them in filth and blood.
But what do you hope? Do you think you can govern innocently?"
(*Dirty Hands*, Sartre)

"In this world, with great power there must also come -
great responsibility."
(*The Amazing Spiderman*, Stan Lee)

Heroes act for their *good* and acknowledge that during the journey there will be moments were the *good* is questioned and the means to achieve that *good* even more. Heroes act for *their* good and accept to do *wrong* in order to achieve that good, and are prepared to live with that burden.

But what if the hero loses himself in the process and uses his powers to hurt others and loses track of his goal? Coming back to the same example as before: Jack Bauer in the TV-series *24* has shown this process of crumbling values. In the first series protagonist *Jack Bauer* stood for the classical war-hero who gave US audiences a try-out solution after the 9/11 attacks. Bauer was built up with characteristics as e.g. being sincere, friendly, loyal, ready to sacrifice).
The last seasons, however, were criticised for their harsh and unnecessary cruelties. The same happened with the TV Series *Homeland*. In both series terrorism and the fear and precautions that go with it, are central. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks such narratives underwent changes both in style and content. Those series emerging right after 9/11 had a clearer black and white idea on who was the hero and who was the villain. Further in time the series became more and more ambiguous and tried to see terrorism from more than one angle or at least not in a strict and dividing *us* (being good) versus *them* (being bad) context. In this sense, these initial narratives followed the development US-policy laid out. It set out with the strong words president George Bush used right after the attacks, ranging from: "There are no rules," to "We're going to smoke them out.". (Knowlton, 2001) to a more nuanced way of communicating.

Kate Allen (director of Amnesty International UK) held such series responsible for a mind shift in society: "People have bought into the idea that their personal safety can be enhanced in some way through the use of torture. That is simply untrue. Programmes like 24, Homeland and Spooks have glorified torture to a generation - but there's a massive difference between a dramatic depiction by screenwriters, and its real-life use by government agents in torture chambers." (BBC, 2014).
This brings us immediately back to the impact of heroes, the changing ethics, the glorification of violence and the fear of fact-fiction reversal or interpretations that can occur. The discussion whether authors are responsible for the effect of their narratives will never cease, but even ignite with every newfound medium (as we have seen in the last decade with ultra-violence games and more recently with first-person shooter games [46]). Once again, the dilemma seems to come down to:
Narratives are considered to be either very harmful and must even be banished, or; Narratives are believed to be harmless and therefore not to be taken seriously.

[46] A first-person shooter (FPS) is a genre of action video game that is played from the point of view of the protagonist. FPS games typically map the gamer's movements and provide a view of what an actual person would see and do in the game. (source: https://www.techopedia.com/definition/241/first-person-shooter-fps)

The evolution from *good* cop to *bad* cop has been seen in different times and in different media. A well-known example is the Dirty Harry-series whereby a *good* cause is blurred by *bad* actions. Such flawed heroes are drawn into a Machiavellian tunnel whereby the means justify the cause. According to Bokiniec (2010) a shift in narratives is currently taking place: "[what] we used to witness on TV was a clear-cut vision of cultural dichotomies and stereotypes (such as gender, class etc.). One of those clear-cut distinctions of popular culture productions was a virtually unambiguous difference between heroes and villains. This distinction was based on an official morality, which in most cases is possible to reduce to few simple rules summarizing things 'good guys don't do': cold-blooded, psychopathic murder, dealing drugs, torture etc. Such deeds, when performed by a character, were associated with villainy. What we have witnessed in last few years is a change in the most popular TV shows: some of its main characters are from the point of view of the distinction sketched above clearly villains, yet placing them as main, most developed characters around which the whole story evolves, we automatically adopt their point of view and want them to succeed in whatever it is they are doing."
This can be seen in the flawed character of Jack Bauer who uses torture, an action mostly reserved for villains, to *get* what he wants. It is this shift Kate Allen opposes to, although we can ask whether heroes must be politically correct. Bauer, from his part, answers such moral questions by stating that:

> "you can look the other way once,
> and it's no big deal,
> except it makes it easier for you to compromise the next time,
> and pretty soon that's all you're doing;
> compromising, because that's the way you think things are done.
> You know those guys I busted?
> You think they were the bad guys?
> Because they weren't, they weren't bad guys, they were just like you and me.
> Except they compromised… once." [ep]

Here, Bauer mixes necessity, utilitarian logic and habituation - an interpretation that can be seen with other heroic villains and certainly within hybrid heroes. "Television was shaping characters such as Jack Bauer from *24* into Christ-like figures, men who sacrificed their happiness and their conscience to do "whatever it takes" to save the lives of many […]. Rationalized violence became an important theme in American fictions as citizens dealt with the fallout from all they had had to deal with emotionally after 9/11 and throughout the raging wars in the Middle East" according to Donnelly (2014, p. 163) who later even connected such fiction with real-life US politics stating that "the horror of the fictional world in which Bauer not only participated but defended was the show's way of helping us

[ep] *24*, Season 1, episode 1, - Written by Robert Cochran & Joel Surnow.

understand the abominable practice a human being for "good reason." (ibid, p. 9).

It seems that flawed and hybrid heroes *know* their actions are wrong in the moral sense and that they inflict pain on others but that this does not outweighs the goal. This way of acting became known as the Lucifer Effect (Zimbardo, 2007) and is an inner logic whereby morality is suspended in order to achieve the goal.
If that goal is benefiting the community then audiences will accept the actions more easily; if the goal is, or gradually becomes only beneficial for the protagonist (rather than for a community) then we can speak of hybrid heroes who seduce audiences in un-ethical web.
Although their motivations and morality can be dubious, hybrid heroes are at least as fascinating and admired then clean-cut heroes.
Hybrid heroes act heroically but no longer with the heroic moral paradigm.

> "As surely as visual representation is more compelling than the mute word or cold exposition, it is equally certain that the theater wields a more profound, more lasting influence than either morality or laws."
> (Theatre considered as Moral Institution, Schiller)

Bandura (1991) tried to condone audiences when stating "By reconstructing conduct, obscuring causal agency, disregarding or misinterpreting injurious consequences, and blaming and devaluating the victims" (p. 67) we change, ignore, adapt and even violate our own moral paradigms "without guilt" for the sake of enjoyment. Shafer and Raney (2012) believe that it is reasonable to believe that in real life we behave in a similar way and "use moral disengagement strategies to maintain positive dispositions towards our narrative friend". This means that audiences in order to learn to identify and empathise with such characters must "take off the default lens of moral scrutiny and put on one of moral permissiveness and justification" (p. 1038). Although the narratives help audiences in differentiating between anti-heroes and morally corrupt villains this helping hand is not present in hybrid narratives, whereby the differentiation comes down to the perception and evaluation of audiences are deliberately misguided and lured into rooting for hybrid heroes.

This brings me to conclude that audiences have learned to enjoy moral flaw and have accepted that the forbidden fruit is an essential part of that enjoyment. Enjoying the wrong is enjoyable because:
a) it is not commonly *allowed*,
b) the protagonist is liked and admired because of a shared *wrong* ethics (thus complex and human like),

c) the behaviour and motives are seen with positive bias
and d) the wrong actions are whitewashed in retrospect.

1.5.3. The Hybrid Hero: a contagious counter-example [48]

Is there a link between societies in transition and the creation and form of fictional heroes?
Is 9/11 an element which provoked and stimulated the development of fictional heroes?
Do audiences adapt moral paradigms to enjoy heroes?
Does the empathy for and the enjoyment of MAC's differs now and then?
Can morality be an element in contemporary heroic fiction?
Can we speak of a contemporary interpretation of fictional heroism?

The hybrid hero is a specific type of fictional hero who recently emerged (post 9/11) which challenges commonly accepted beliefs on the beneficial impact of narratives and empathy. The hybrid hero stands on the shoulders of previous MACs and seems to challenge and combine different heroic and villainous features.

The hybrid hero is a contemporary heroic *face*.
His essential reason to exist is to challenge, lure and question moral paradigms from audiences while they are enjoying gripping narratives.
A hybrid hero is a contemporary, sexy, cool heroic character that serves as a tool to tell stories for today's audiences who are both anxious and allergic to morality wrapped in narratives.

Unconsciously, this hybrid hero was active within my work but it was only during this research that I was able to see (in my work and that of others) and define this counter-exemplary model.

Although I will mainly speak on the counter-exemplary hybrid hero I will also discuss the exemplary franchised hero. Both heroic types are each other's opposites but both became immensely popular post 9/11. They certainly prove that fictional heroes are immortal and can adapt their *face* to whatever circumstance and need.

[48] Parts of this chapter were previously published in the Journal of Humanistic Psychology, Special Issue: Heroism and the Human Experience (2017).

The (re)birth of fictional heroes

Fictional heroes are creations and since their creators are in search of impact on audiences; both the social and cultural context plays a pivotal role in how, which and when heroes are created. These contexts actively steer the creation and/or destruction of heroes as we have seen in the aftermath of the tragic 9/11 attacks, when creators searched ways to process the events through narratives that soothed, entertained, or glorified certain paradigms. (See also: The expected return of the hero, Chapter 2)

During the research, I saw connections between reality and its effect on fiction, and vice versa. I tend to believe that major events trigger narratives. And that narratives can console, unite, or help audiences to cope and process these events. Examples can be found in the earliest plays (e.g. *The Persians* by Aeschylus in 472BC) as well as in relation to the tragic events of 9/11. Burke (2015:33) said on the massive popularisation of comics and superheroes in the aftermath of 9/11: "The ritual functions (nostalgia, escapism, and wish fulfilment) that comic book adaptations serve may go some way towards explaining their increased popularity following 9/11, as US audiences craved the comfort that these films could provide."

It seems that when life is too harsh, audiences turn (or escape) towards fiction in their search for answers. This *need* should not be cast away as a primitive or naïve response to mayhem, but proves – in our opinion – the essence and unique value of art and narratives. The consoling effect, the insights, and the emotional cleansing that many members of the audience have experienced at certain times when confronted with narratives rendered emotions as joy and sadness. Allison and Goethals (2012) directly link reality and fiction: "Human-caused catastrophes such as the holocaust, the September 11th attacks, and the Virginia Tech shooting tragedy were fertile soil from which great acts of heroism blossomed." This leads up to a rapport and engagement with the arts: the unique sense of togetherness with the fictional character and other members of the audience.

The explosion in the Twin Towers had such a strong impact that a conglomerate of narratives - on all sorts of media, with different target groups and with different intentions (from consoling to uniting, from explaining to blaming) - has been formed over time. Influential critics, such as James Wood and others, detected a turn in literary and cultural production after 9/11 while Versluys said that: "This substantial body of 9/11 fiction, which is growing by the day, rangers from the absolutely inane to the interesting and the probing." (2009, a, p.141) later adding that authors should come up with narratives that lead to "a kind of affective and

empathic understanding" in post 9/11 times. (2009, b, p. 688).(See also, Cavedon 2015, Morley 2016)

Within a few years after the attacks, a conglomerate of heroic narratives emerged; some referred specifically to the 9/11 attacks like the TV-series *24* (Surnow and Cochran) or *Homeland* (Gordon and Gansa), novels like *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (Foer)* or *We Can Be Heroes* (Bruton), and movies like *United 93* (Greengrass) or *World Trade Center* (Stone). The movie release of *Black Hawk Down* by Ridley Scott was even "moved ahead by its studio after the attacks as it was ""rushed into theaters in December 2001" to capitalize on prevailing public sentiment in America as the war on Terror began to take shape"" (Markovitz in Hassler-Forest, p.31, 2011). While Pheasant-Kelly saw that "superheroes characters have become increasingly popular during the post 9/11 period, offering escapism and reassurance to audiences in vulnerable times" (2013, p. 143).

These creators tried to articulate or oppose to the emotions of the audience, some even tried to draw lines between *good* and *evil*, between *them* and *us*. Captain America speaks on the 9/11 attacks in the comic novel *Enemy Chapter One: Dust* (Rieber and Cassady, 2002): "We've got to be stronger than we've ever been. Or they've won. We can hunt them down. We can scour every bloodstained trace of their terror from the Earth. We can turn every stone they've ever touched to dust, and every blade of grass to ash. And it won't matter. We've got to be stronger than we've ever been—as a people. As a nation. We have to be America. Or they've won. We're going to make it through this—we, the people. United by a power that no enemy of freedom could begin to understand. We share—we are—the American Dream." Going even further in the *them* versus *us* discourse we find, at the end of the same issue "Captain America, hero of World War II, fights a group of turban-clad Arab men wielding axes, an image that strongly reinforces anti-Muslim slurs that suggest that Islam is a medieval religion of a backward civilization … much of the post-9/11 Captain America could easily be read through the lens of neo-conservative conceptions of America's relationship to those it deems terrorists." (Beaty, 2009, p. 127)

The need to answer drastic events in real life with fictional narratives and heroes - in search of an explanation and/or to process the events - is a typical phenomenon when coping with changing realities like.
We saw an increase of fantasy and post-apocalyptic novels like *The Road* by McCarthy (2006), *Life as We Knew It* trilogy (2006-2010) by Pfeffer, TV-series like *Jericho* (2006-2008), *The 100* (2014- . . .) which in their own way mirror and thus try to cope with the transformations in reality. Dystopian literature as *1984* (Orwell), *The Man in the High Castle* (Dick), or *The Plot Against America* (Roth) have seen a renewed popularity since President Trump took

office in 2017 (Broos, 2017). Furthermore, the production and distribution of over 40 superhero movies in the coming years clearly show the audience's need for heroic narratives. [49]

In recent times two opposing heroic types became immensely popular: the (counter-exemplary) hybrid hero (e.g. Dexter, Frank Underwood, Walter White) and the (exemplary) franchised hero (e.g. Spiderman, Captain America, The Avengers). This led to contemporary perception and reception of heroic narratives as "audiences have complex perceptions of the morality of heroes and villains [that are] much more multifaceted than the "white hat/black hat" assumptions of past character studies. The fact that being a hero is not merely "not being a villain" or "being good" and that being a villain is more than "not being a hero/being bad" is something that is often overlooked." according to Eden et al. (2015).

Both the franchised and hybrid hero try, with a specific set of characteristics and moral frameworks, to sooth, entertain or challenge their audiences.
Both heroic types focus on the reception by audiences although their means and behaviour differ on many levels. [50]

In between: In recent times, it seems that hybrid heroes are gradually evolving into franchised heroes (as we can see with the numerous seasons of e.g. *Dexter*, *House of Cards*, *Breaking Bad).* The moral complexity of hybrid heroes has, is in today's world, evolved as the *new* normal and thus a growing commercialisation takes place. On the other hand, there is a tendency to blur the moral lines of typical franchised heroes as the popular *Spiderman*.

Hybrid heroes and their hybrid features

The hybrid hero (within my work e.g. Rodrigo Borgia) is the symbiosis of classic heroic and villainous features and is therefore a contemporary interpretation of both character types and their classic concepts. The sum of the mix is why I chose the word *hybrid*, as both sets of features coincide fluently. This mix is, in my opinion, a contemporary rewriting of fictional heroism and can be traced back to 9/11 as a breaking point in time.
This ambiguous hybrid hero whereby the moral and actions of heroes seem to overlap more and more with those of the classic villains, has become popular and is conquering different media, and thus different audiences. I choose to label them as hybrid heroes because this counter-example holds

[49] Source: Doran, 2017: https://www.newsarama.com/21815-the-new-full-comic-book-superhero-movie-schedule.html
[50] Overtime the hybrid heroes got franchised themselves as we can see in the multi-seasonal series as *Dexter* (2006-2013), *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), *House of Cards* (2013-…).

characteristics of the classic hero, of his opponent the villain and from the so-called anti-hero (which I prefer to define as flawed hero).
Earlier versions of counterexamples have been labelled as a Byronic hero, a heroic villain (De Wijze, 2008), etc. but I choose the word hybrid because it emphasises a combination, a sum of elements and thus a symbiosis between heroes and villains, rather than a hero with flaws or vices as the mentioned labels focus on.

The hybrid hero is neither a hero nor a villain, he or she is a species that consists of both classic archetypes and therefore we can, I believe, speak of a contemporary hybrid heroic type.
The hybrid hero holds heroic features as being strong, determined, brave, courageous but also typical villainous features as: egoistic, vain, ruthless, non-caring/non-empathic. This combination brings us to a character that ferociously challenges the *rules* of heroism.

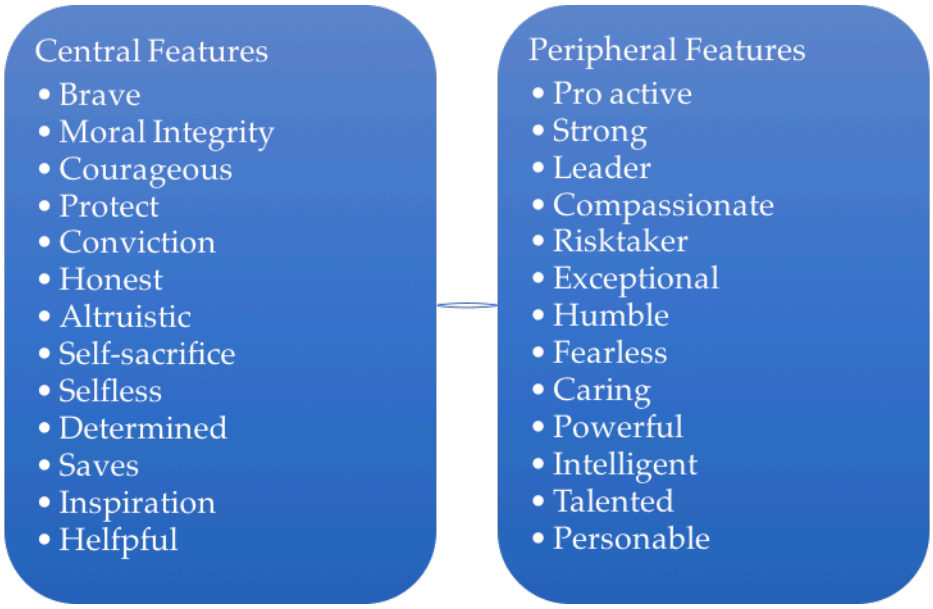
Heroes must act exemplary, as *ought to be*.
Hybrid heroes do not, as they make the rules along the way.

This leaves creators with possibilities to lure, to seduce audiences into the hybrid world where the forbidden fruits are providing excitement and tension between morally acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour or wishes. The rendered ethical and emotional uncertainty or confusion is the result hybrid heroes and their creators are actively aiming for. The need from creators to play with heroism, empathy, narratives and possible moral after-effects can be satisfied within this contemporary ambiguous and hybrid arena.

The hybrid hero challenges earlier concepts on the beneficial impact of narratives and works on guilty and malicious pleasure whereby the characters hold features which lure audiences into liking them - and thus, as we have seen, audiences evade moral reflection in order to remain loyal to those hybrid heroes. Hybrid heroes lure audiences with their features; their feathers are so beautiful audiences are (morally) blinded.

Kinsella et al. (2015) described heroes based on two sets of features; central and peripheral features. Without much effort, we can interchange those features of heroes with those of hybrid heroes. Going from the classic hero towards the hybrid hero seems to be a small step, with profound empathic and moral impact which clearly shows that ambiguity is closely connected with heroism.

Kinsella et al. (2015)



By changing only a few features a different (hybrid) character can be created.

1.5.4. Sign O' Times?

"The television series achieving the highest levels of success in the past decade, from *Breaking Bad* (2008 - 2013) to *Game of Thrones* (2010 -) and *House of Cards* (2012 -)
all share a common denominator: dark, complex protagonists who aren't great guys.
Often referred to as 'anti-heroes,' these characters give viewers the ability to explore the limits of human conduct and test the boundaries of acceptability.
They are signalling a shift in the culture of television."
(*Why have television audiences fallen so hard for the anti-hero*, Saporito)

"The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 were more than a mere historical event.
Their impact was experienced as the kind of epochal singularity that created a sense of historical rupture.
In the decade that has followed, the term "post--9/11" has become commonplace as an indicator of a politics, an ideology, and a western culture that has redefined itself in terms of new discourses of power and identity."
(*Superheroes and the Bush doctrine: narrative and politics in post--9/11 discourse*, Hassler-Forest)

Since creators want to attract attention to their narratives they come up with (entertaining) narratives that, exactly as the myths did, try to provide answers in a transforming context. Such mythical stories not only gave humans a place within the bigger picture but furthermore spoke on values and in many cases, used (exemplary) heroes to define these values; such narratives are there to explain and comfort, to connect and identify communities and to set ethical boundaries.
Because of his flexible and mouldable face, the fictional hero emerges both as transactional and as transformational leader in narratives (Bass, 1990). The fictional hero proposes transactional ways to overcome obstacles and, in many cases, represents an exemplary moral paradigm.

While discussing and presenting my hybrid hero these, 9/11 as a turning point has been questioned. It is not my intention to artificially connect dates with phenomena in society but, in my opinion, 9/11 is not only a concrete point in world history but a symbolic date after which profound changes on different levels - among them the arts - took place. (see also, Žižek, 2000). A growing number of researches seem to prove that indeed some changes in fictional heroics and narratives (both in content and popularity) took place after the tragic attacks in the morning of 9/11. "Since 2001, more comics-based superhero movies have been released than in all the prior years combined, doubling their domestic box-office average ($3 billion conservatively) with "darker" superhero franchises ahead." according to

Communication & Rhetoric researcher Treat (2009) or "In the wake of 9/11 there has been a marked increase in depictions of terrorism in Hollywood film. This shift has been particularly significant in superhero films." (MacFarlane, 2014). (See also: Brereton et al. (2012), Dittmer (2004), Legatt (2015), Riegler (2015))
Gerald Seymour (1975, p. 62) famously wrote, "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" and pinpointed the essence of the heros' problematic and ever-changing status. Depending on the standpoint and the individual actions one will be considered heroic or villainous, but it is this black and white world the hybrid hero challenges by being both.

For more on the impact of 9/11 on narratives, See also: Keniston and Quin (Literature after 9/11, 2008), Hassler-Forest (Capitalist Superheroes: Caped Crusaders in the Neoliberal Age, 2011), Powell (The Trauma Aesthetic: (Re)Mediating Absence, Emptiness and Nation in Post-9/11 American Film and Literature, 2011).

In their search for empathy with audiences and their ways to make sense of a world in transformation, both the franchised and the hybrid hero uses of the universal features but their normative frameworks are constructed in totally different and challenging ways. (Universal heroic features include:
a) heroes act at a unique and specific moment in time,
b) the actions of heroes are considered as special and can be admired by others,
c) the hero chooses to act in search for a change in the status quo,
d) the hero is willing to endure physical and/or mental pain to achieve the goal,
e) the hero does exist through the attribution of others. etc.)

Precursors?

In pre-9/11 times, the fictional mafia boss Tony Soprano paved the way for popular hybrid heroes like Dexter, Walter White or Frank Underwood. [51] Within Tony Soprano the hybrid combination of the *good* and the *bad*, the hero and the villain and the search for empathy already germinates. But in order to develop empathy within audiences the creators use Tony's weekly sessions with his therapist to reveal his inner struggles and fears and confesses his guilt and shame. The character, Tony, is questioning his actions and beliefs that conflict with his inner state. The subsequent struggle to be the mafia leader despite his fears is a step to narrow the gap between *good* and bad: as most audiences are sucked into the viewpoint of the MAC and

[51] I choose characters from TV-series, because these characters are better known and more widespread and because TV-series are nowadays the medium with the largest audience. TV-series and films are the main playground for heroes nowadays and due to their popularity are forerunners in searching new ways to narrate and develop heroes. Heroes shifted from novels to TV-series and movies since the second half of the 20th century.

gradually understand, accept and even justify the actions of these MACs. [52] This is a step towards developing empathy for the *devil*.
The main difference between Tony and the others is that Tony still has a clear idea on what is good and bad, while Dexter, White or Underwood question such labels. Besides Tony tries to overcome his *badness*, his *villainous* nature while hybrid heroes accept their dark side (often even glorify it or consider it an asset).

Even earlier MACs can be found in characters as *Frankenstein* or *Jekyll and Hyde*. Within these narratives the protagonist is not considered as responsible for the villainous actions and audiences follow the struggle to overcome their *badness*. Rather than enjoying their *badness* (as e.g. *Frank Underwood* does) *Frankenstein* and *Jekyll* are victims of their fate and features; they do their utter best to change their nature and their circumstances. *Jekyll* tries not to transform into *Hyde*, *Frankenstein* does his utter best to control his monster; there is no glorification, no excuses whatsoever. What we witness is a victim (an underdog) trying to be free. The journey in these narratives focuses on becoming *good* and as most audiences consider such expeditions a worthy battle they can stimulate empathic reactions, next to that such characters can also be seen as tragic underdogs. The villain who fights his villainy and searches ways to liberate himself is a narrative tool to attract empathy.

Hybrid heroes, on the other hand, do not wish to become *good* but nevertheless attract and claim empathy. The inspirational value of heroes is challenged by this counter-example and therefore is a highly enjoyable try-out for audiences on how *not* to behave, think or act.

Where earlier war-heroes or flawed heroes were in search of the good (no matter the means or context) the hybrid hero does not necessarily have the wish to become *good* or heroic in the classic meaning but does want our empathy. By doing so the hybrid hero challenges earlier heroic concepts but and, in my opinion more important, challenges the audiences in a moral, ideological way.

Similar processes can be seen in the remake of the TV-series *House of Cards* (originally a BBC production from 1990): There is no concrete link to reality opposed to the original, where the first episode starts with an image of the then prime minister Margaret Thatcher. Next to that, sensuality and eroticism play an important role in the remake, just as the focus on the wife of Frank Underwood does, who resembles Lady Macbeth. The original

[52] The Sopranos was a highly succesfull and popular series winning 21 Emmy and 5 Golden Globe Awards. The international succes soon followed and seems to reveal that audiences were more than willing to accept this flawed hero.

series and the remake show us how the focus on the hybrid nature grew and that empathy with such heroes became more important.

Sympathy and/or empathy?
Villains and anti-heroes do wrong and search audiences' sympathy.
Hybrid heroes do wrong and search audiences' empathy.

The hybrid hero behaves as a challenging counterexample for audiences and as a tool for creators to reflect on heroism (and furthermore inflicts questions on the actions, morality, goals and attractiveness of form and content). Such counter-examples, fallen angels or devils in disguise, excite - perhaps surprisingly - enjoyment and empathy due to their hybrid nature. They follow *wrong* moralities in a *good* heroic way, or, they aspire *good* causes through *wrong* behaviour. The fact that hybrid heroes evoke empathy sets them apart from the classic villain or anti-hero, who can evoke enjoyment but not necessarily empathy; e.g. Shakespeare's much-loved villain, *Richard III*, is enjoyed by most audiences but does not necessarily generate empathy.

Most audiences will be able to develop sympathy for Richard and his quest for power, but because of his villainous thoughts and means (e.g. killing children), audiences have difficulty developing genuine empathy. Richard's psychological scars and following self-justification do not outweigh his gruesome actions; this leaves Richard lonely, both *in* the play (as he loses all his power in the end) as *out* of the play. Shakespeare presents us with a villain who, due to his underdog position and boldness, can attract sympathy but not empathy: we can feel *with* Richard, but will most likely not feel *as* Richard. Shakespeare strikingly articulates this loneliness (both in and out the play) with the well-known roar: "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" [53] Audiences were not challenged to embrace the character, as it remained a seducing counterexample (and thus followed the rewarding-punishing concept of Aristotle, *Poetica* Vol. 23:1452b). Other examples can be found in Bateman (*American Psycho*), Tony Montana (*Scarface*), Alex Delarge *(A Clockwork Orange*). In recent times, MACs actively search for *our* empathy, as we can see in the mentioned popular series.

Hybrid heroes, with their focus on audiences, are aiming at the empathy, the complicity, the approval and agreement from audiences as they announce their "intention to manipulate, mislead, and destroy the embodiment of humanity and then brags about his subsequent success." (Keller, 2015, p. 114). In this sense, they aim at the responsibility of the spectator. The complicity with audiences feels similar to the Stockholm syndrome; audiences know that the characters they love, enjoy, justify and therefore

[53] Shakespeare, Richard III: Act 5, Scene 4

protect are *bad*, but audiences cannot resist the heroic aura despite the cruel actions and consequences (just because hybrid heroes have features and characteristics that are liked). The complicity is often searched by working both in and out of the narrative: *in* the narrative through similarity, probability and pleasure and *out* of the narrative through contextualizing in search of identification (*In* the narrative through their actions that seduce audiences. *Out* of the narrative through e.g. addressing audiences).
Frank Underwood perfectly fits the definition of the modern hero, who is "someone who is seriously morally flawed, but whom we are nonetheless encouraged to sympathize with" (Vaage 2016, p. 36). Or as Keller (2015, p. 120) puts is "The audience winks at the villainous audacity of the aspiring politician, secretly admiring him for his winning attitude and his ability to get what he wants at all costs." Underwood and other hybrid heroes allow "the audience to both admire and abhor the spectacle of American politics, to remain simultaneously horrified by its callous disregard for the interests of the country and amused and entertained by the maniacal and efficient pursuit of self-interest." (Keller 2015, p. 120) (see also Klarer, 2014, p. 203-220).

We used this complicity in the third part of our Borgia trilogy, where we asked audiences why they enjoyed the gruesome Borgia actions. This can also be seen in *House of Cards* whereby the character Frank Underwood, regularly turns to the camera and directly addresses the spectators, e.g. in Season 2, Episode 1- "Did you think I'd forgotten you? Perhaps you'd hoped I had." (Franklin, 2014) also in Season 2, Episode 9 - "Do you think I'm a hypocrite? Well you should. I wouldn't disagree with you. The road to power is paved with hypocrisy, and casualties. Never regret." (Foster, 2014). Or with the voice off in *Dexter* (where audiences are drawn as close as possible towards the stream of consciousness of Dexter Morgan), or the emotional and domestic motivation to start *cooking* leaves audiences with feelings of empathy towards Walter White.

Both the similarity and the probability are used to its maximum within hybrid heroes, next to the malicious pleasure they render their audiences. But "Perhaps the most important factor is that these series don't underestimate us as an audience … these villainous protagonists are a symbol of rebellion for bored audiences. They're a momentum of change for how stories are told to us and how we feel about characters in general. It would be easy to hate Walter White and his naked ambition for power but through gripping, interesting writing we grow to enjoy his megalomania." (Scriptwriter, Duka, 2013)

The search for empathy from hybrid heroes might be the element that differentiates them form other MACs, the moral *lesson* is not to denounce the

MAC in the end but to realise that one can develop empathy (instead of sympathy) for paradigms and characters one would otherwise oppose to.

1.5.5. Ambiguous effects on audiences?

A fictional context and a truthful background can persuade audiences of the fact that *wrong* actions are essential and justified to achieve the goal. They can lure audiences into accepting narratives and characters that defend *ambiguous* moral paradigms. Creators, thus, can invite audiences into the contextualised tunnel vision of hybrid heroes and because of that audiences develop empathy for those they would normally avoid or even despise. According to Lübecker (2015) this process is already taking place as contemporary theatre and independent movie or TV directors no longer necessarily defend the life-affirming concepts of commercial entertainment (as laid out by Aristotle) and can therefore challenge dominant cultural values; examples can be found in the biracial *Spiderman* (2011- . . .), the TV-series *Transparent* (2014- . . .), or *Sense8* (2015- . . .), focusing on themes as gender, sexual orientation, religion.

The ambiguity of these hybrid heroes and the subsequent ambiguous reception is precisely what creators are searching for. In a provocative manner, these counterexamples *play* with morality and empathy and focus on the controversial reaction of and reflection by audiences. Such provocations are developed consciously, not in the least to raise affect and awareness for the unexpected and counter exemplary nature of these heroes and their thought-provoking actions.
It is my experience that hybrid heroes trigger moral reflection more easily than clean and exemplary heroes and since I believe that the arts can play a social, political, and thus moral role, I choose figures that will have as much impact as possible (See also: Eden & Daalmans, 2016; Eden, Kleemans, & Daalmans, 2017).

Creators know their characters are dubious, nevertheless (and perhaps because of that) they try and develop a close rapport whereby audiences are invited to root for the *wrong* character. Due to contextualisation, background and the complicity audiences *forget* they are rooting for wrong moralities. The fact that audiences can develop empathy, even enjoy, such counter-exemplars sets the hybrid hero apart from the villains who in most cases were met with sympathy at most. Judge Posner already in 1997, among others, warned for the villainous characters because "The mind that you work your way into, learning to see the world from its perspective, may be the mind of a Meursault, an Edmund, a Lafcadio, a Macbeth, a Tamerlane, a torturer, a sadist, even a Hitler."

But Zillmann (1995) worked intensively on the involvement of audiences and stated that: "Good and liked characters may have skeletons in the closet, exhibit a tragic flaw, or simply turn ugly. Analogously, evil and resented characters may display a positive side, redeem themselves, and become liked." The success of hybrid hero clearly shows how they make use of what Zillmann meant with his ADT-theory. Raney and Janicke (2011) already showed that audiences find ways to like the protagonist, despite their sins. … moral considerations would apparently need to decrease in their importance as a character's morality becomes more complex." (p. 1037). Thus, paradoxically, it seems audiences adapt their morality because they want to like the character, since we "use moral disengagement strategies to maintain positive dispositions towards our narrative friend" (ibid) and in his sense the ADT-theory by Zillmann still stands as audiences, indeed approve what they like.

The reversal of disposition becomes a tool and an asset to attract *wrong* empathy: *bad* fictional actions can have as much - or perhaps even more - impact than *good* fictional actions because of the hero's hybrid nature and his subsequent counter-exemplary behaviour.

The hybrid hero can inflict strong levels of *wrong* empathy and this, among other reasons, on:
a) Ethical paradigms: Audiences can share the unethical wishes of the character – or at least wish they were as bold, strong or daring.
b) The harmlessness of fiction: Audiences know and acknowledge the fictional nature of the characters (since they are not real the characters are considered as harmless, therefore audiences can behave morally off-guard)[54]
c) The attitude of the hero: Audiences are more easily charmed or blinded for wrongdoings if the hero is eloquent, elegant, ad-rem, humorous, bold, smart, etc.
d) The context: If the fictional context is created in such a way that the character has no other option than to act *badly*, audiences willingly accept wrong means to justify a (wrong) end.[55]
Bokiniec (2010, pp 193-213) adds two other elements: the *effectiveness* of the actions and to self-proclaimed *messianic* status.

[54] The hybrid hero thus misuses the willingness and the suspension of disbelief from audiences, or as Nell states "we willingly enter the world of fiction because the scepticism to which our adult sophistication condemns us is wearying: we long for safe places – a love we can entirely trust, a truth we can entirely believe. Fiction meets that need precisely because we know it to be false." (Lost in a book, p. 56)
[55] See also: Van Tourhout, B. (2015). What with Sympathy for the Devil?. Presented at the EMPATHY2-The Empathy Project: 2nd Global Meeting, Oxford, Mansion Field College, United Kingdom.

The search for empathy, inspiration and reflection within audiences is, I believe, the essence of what hybrid heroes (and thus their creators) advocate. Although these counter-examples are paradoxically popular, they question the function of heroes and the instructional value of narratives. This could in the future backfire on the hybrid hero because the process of habituation can set in or audiences are fed up with ambiguous morality and want clear-cut moral from heroes.

In terms of the audience, the interplay between heroic and villainous features leads to ambiguous empathy and strong reactions from audience members since controversial and polarizing opinions are what creators of hybrid heroes look for. Hybrid heroes actively raise questions on the function and means of narratives and bring, paradoxically, morality back to the centre of narratives.

The immoral or amoral hybrid hero is able to shock audiences, because of this shock chances are high that audiences will reflect on morality. Thus, by presenting a counter-example, exemplary behaviour is more discussed. The ambiguity of these hybrid heroes and the subsequent ambiguous reception is precisely what creators are searching for. In a provocative manner, these counterexamples *play* with morality and empathy and focus on the controversial reaction and reflection by audiences. They provoke ambivalent enjoyment and (for now) we love to hate these hybrid heroes.

Moreover, audiences are more open towards narratives and willingly accept deeper levels of emotion, action, and/or violence in fiction than in real life or as Goethals (2015) stated, audiences perceive characters "in a more extreme fashion, because they are typically less complicated, and of course are drawn favorably. But fictional villains are seen as worse than real ones." In other words, large parts of the audiences are prepared to give in on ethics - because it is fiction - a reality the hybrid hero gratefully accepts to playfully corrupt its audience.

Raney and Brant (2002) concluded that if "the portrayal of justice is judged to be similar to the viewer's sense of justice, then enjoyment would seemingly increase." This judgement theory leaves creators, perhaps unexpectedly, with options to develop counter-examples that challenge common moral, behaviour and attribution of heroism. Because a fictional context and truthful background can:

a) persuade audiences that *wrong* actions are essential and justified in order to achieve the goal,

and b) can lure audiences into accepting narratives and characters that defend *wrong* moral paradigms.

The transactional behaviour combined with an enviable ability to be as slippery as an eel are heroic elements the hybrid hero (mis)uses to lure audiences into accepting ambiguous moral frameworks. Hurley says on the

matter "Theatre is bigger than life precisely because its emotional repertoire is bigger than our quotidian one … emotional highs and lows are not generally experienced offstage at such close intervals or at such extremes."[56]

Although the Underwoods, the Borgia, etc. are aggressive, harsh and villainous, they are popular, and looking at the audience reactions, it is clear that both (war) superheroes and hybrid heroes attract large audiences and live next to each other. [57]
The massive success and broader impact of such series may surprise us. Although fictional characters as Frank Underwood, Dexter or Walter White appeal to dark ethics they seem to be able to attract empathy and complicity to attract audiences. Could it be that what Underwood wants is what many members of the audience would want? Could it be that audiences consider experiencing fiction, this sharing and agreeing with immoral characters seems as harmless and as nothing more than entertainment? Further research in this matter would certainly be valuable, although Gierzynski, et al. see a "causal linkage between exposure to these shows and the belief in a just world - exposure to the repeated lessons of both shows that the world is cruel and unjust seems to have dampened the tendency to believe the opposite, that the world is just …we feel confident that exposure to Game of Thrones and House of Cards is responsible for the lower levels of the belief in a just world that we found in our studies. The same holds for beliefs about ends justifying means and we suspect that by extension the impact of House of Cards on levels of cynicism about government." (2015, p. 37)

How can the hybrid hero inflict ambiguous empathy?
Just as with non-hybrid heroes similarity is a tool to strengthen identification with audiences. Susceptibility can be intensified through similarities between the fictional and real world in personal life, context, crisis, etc. (Keen, 2007, p. 94).
Psychologists Krebs, Barnett and Batson delivered empirical test results on the connection between similarity and levels of empathic effect. Krebs (1975) found out that feeling or believing to be similar to another increases empathic connections, while Barnett (1984, 1986, 1987) found that being e.g. the victim of rape evoked stronger empathic reactions with other victims, Batson (1996) found out that women - in general - are behaving more empathic than men and concluded that similarity facilitates empathy but is not a necessary condition.

As seen in Chapter 3, similarity and probability play a role in generating empathy within audiences. Similarity works on a shared past between

[56] Hurley (Theatre & Feeling, p. 7)
[57] Source: http://variety.com/2015/digital/news/netflix-originals-viewer-data-1201480234/

audience and fictional characters, while probability works on an activated imagination within audiences inflicted through the narrative.

Besides the misuse of *trust* and complicity between character and spectator, I see three elements that can become tools for hybrid heroes: the idea of harmless fiction, the syrup of aesthetics and narratives and the unethical wish.

The idea of *harmless fiction* stems from the adult conviction that make-believe will not truly interfere with real life; that watching unethical or unlawful things in fiction is sheer *play*. If the narrative is set in another time and place the harmlessness of fiction will, in my opinion, be perceived even more strongly (this is one of the reasons I often use historical figures in my work). Audiences are willingly accepting the fictional truthfulness (when probable) above the genuine non-fictional truth. (This idea of harmless fiction contradicts the belief that narratives have beneficial impacts. Strangely enough audiences give value to narratives and can swap both concepts, some narratives are considered as make belief while other narratives are seen as influential.)

The *syrup of aesthetics and narratives,* includes, among others, dramatic tension, beauty and humour as means to hush critical reflection. These tools can be used to increase the empathic rapport, even though the hero may be ambiguous. The form and attraction narratives hold, can blind audiences. Next to that, during performances, we learned that if the situations are presented in such a way that there seems to be no other appropriate action, audiences are willing to accept these actions and empathise with them, regardless of their ethical consequences or inflicted distress, the tunnel vision will be accepted. So, both the form and structure of the narrative and the features of the characters play a role as sedating syrup.

The *unethical wish* forms a third element to stimulate empathy. Audiences, authors and actors all share, in some form or another, those dark wishes fuelled by ambition, pride, lust for power or the need for freedom. Characters acting with other normative schemes are more able to follow their heart and minds: this appealing form of carte blanche focuses on underlying unethical wishes and could confront audiences with their ambivalent empathy.

Fig. 24: The Borgia Trilogy - Part III, Homo Solo
© Bram Vandeveire – NUNC

Hybrid heroes in artistic practice

We presented the outrageous Borgia family as a group of picaresque heroes. With flair and elegance, they tricked their opponents and killed and raped their way through society. Audiences witnessed the performance with undisguised amusement and seemed to overlook the dreadful situations just because of the humorous, eloquent and elegant nature of the characters. We *lured* the audiences exactly as the Borgia themselves had done with their counterparts in the 15th century. We used the Borgia way of thinking to create a beautiful and attractive web, designed to drawn in our audiences.

In the last part of the trilogy however we reversed everything: from language idiom to mise-en-scène. We unmasked and demystified the narrative by breaking down the fourth wall, by asking audiences why they laughingly witnessed murder, why they had not interfered and why their moral paradigm had shifted.
This felt like a cold shower for audiences. Some of them were shocked, others did not accept the meltdown of the fictionalised world and still others felt attacked by these questions. Once this chilling moment had passed, we continued our narrative in an almost documentary manner. The characters defended themselves and explained their underlying intentions. But the unmasking was a mask itself, just as the Borgia always double tricked their opponents. In the end, we drew audiences back into the narrative by creating *the devil's devil* when Cesare, Rodrigo's son, poisoned his father.
This led to a heart-breaking final monologue by Rodrigo full of regret, guilt and melancholy.

Audiences were once again *lured* into the narrative and once again had forgotten the moral implications.

The *harmlessness* of fiction, the *syrup* and underlying unethical *wishes* of the audience - which connected them with the Borgia - succeeded in this final part of the Borgia Trilogy in leading the audience to reflect upon ethics and empathy.

In the end, the Borgia family and their actions were no longer central; it was how audiences had responded to these actions.
The alleged safety of witnessing others boomeranged, this was - for most - audiences an unexpected countermove, as most assumed a catharsis would take place in the final part of the trilogy. Audiences were morally lulled to sleep in Part I and II and, unexpectedly, to be woken up in Part III.

We believe that Part III had its impact because of the atmosphere in the previous Parts I and II, and therefore chose this confrontational form rather than the expected catharsis - which is, in my opinion, too clean and harmless to have moral impact or to generate reflection in current times.

The search for hybrid enjoyment and the subsequent reflection was the reason to set up this performance; we presented what we opposed to but packaged it in an attractive way, its final deconstruction inflicted morality in a paradoxical and contemporary manner.
We created a hybrid hero who was loosely based on the historical Rodrigo Borgia, this gave the character an authenticity and veracity audiences did not question. All these elements combined answered both the need for enjoyment and playfulness by audiences and my personal search to bring morality back to the arts.

The pleasure of encountering hybrid heroes with their heroic villainy and their villainous heroics gives audiences the possibility to try-out and even identify with their ambiguous proposals; it leads to a close rapport between hybrid hero and audience, which makes hybrid narratives a fascinating and challenging way to communicate with contemporary audiences.

In my work, the hybrid hero gives me the opportunity to inject narratives with moral and ethical elements. Not only by presenting dilemmas or judging behaviour of the characters but by accepting and even glorifying behaviour that is considered wrong or at least ambiguous. It is my experience that narratives can bring audiences into a state of noncritical identification with hybrid heroes and this going along process is precisely what I am after. During the encounter with the narrative, audiences follow the hybrid character into its tunnel, and gradually become morally off-guard. Once that experience has ended, they *wake up* and cannot otherwise than reflect on what and who they empathised with. Thus, first I search

ways to lure audience as deeply as possible into the narrative only to *release* them afterward so that they can reflect and discuss their moral transformation during the narrative.

The hybrid hero is a tool to realise moral reflection while denouncing it during the narrative. Paradoxically, hybrid heroes focus on exemplary heroes and their moral impact: By presenting counterexamples, audiences are forced to reflect on examples, by showing inappropriate behaviour, their focus lies on appropriate behaviour or by showing the *bad*, paradoxically, the *good* is emphasised. The encountered enjoyment and try-out is a hybrid tool to (morally) enjoy and despise the counter-example.

The recent re-emergence and major shift toward franchised heroes and hybrid heroes must, in my opinion, be seen as an effort to respond to a world in crisis; an attempt to make sense of complex unfolding events, or to propose a direction. This process of proposing concepts, trying out lives, soothing and/or questioning is, in my opinion, an essential element of the arts. I believe that the arts can be both a forerunner, a reflector of society and a soothing entertainer.

Franchised heroes

On the other end of the spectrum, we find franchised heroes (often war-heroes) like Spiderman, The X-Men, Captain America, etc. They focus on exemplary behaviour and follow the punish versus reward pattern conceived by Aristotle as the ultimate victory of *good* over *bad*. This paradigm still holds appeal in popular media as it has a soothing and affirming effect on audiences. Aristotle, in his *Poetica*, searched ways to punish villains and honour heroes as he recommended, "one should not show worthy men passing from good fortune to bad. That does not arouse fear or pity but shocks our feelings. Nor again wicked people passing from bad fortune to good" (Aristotle, 1932, Poet. 1452b).

It is fascinating that both the hybrid and franchised hero simultaneously gained a renewed popularity post 9/11 and that both reach large, dedicated, and often overlapping audiences. But just like with every fictional hero, both types received critical responses from audiences and press. It is my experience that heroes reap what they sow (See also, Chapter 4: Moral implications).

We witnessed the reception of such hybrid heroes in *The Borgia Trilogy*, whereby audiences responded both emotionally and in a nuanced way to the effect and affect they experienced. Although Hall and Bracken (2011) see a relation between a (heroic) genre and the specific enjoyment or empathy, audiences develop as they claim that: "dramas or romances, may be more likely to rely on the evocation of empathic emotions in the viewers, whereas

enjoyment of others, such as action or comedies, may tend to rely on other factors such as visual spectacle." Further research is needed to reveal a correlation between the typology of heroes and their specific reception.

Expiry Date?

Although both heroic types try to entertain, they have unique intentions; franchised heroes try to sooth and confirm basic concepts, while the hybrid hero does the opposite and tries to evoke questions and raise reflection. The soothing, even escapist, enjoyment that franchised heroes render is perfectly fit as a *tranquilizer* for today's stressed and troubled audiences, they are meant to be an entertaining sedative. The hybrid heroes, on the other hand, rub salt in the wound as they emphasise the ambiguity, the unknown, the moral responsibility (and therefore can be a guilty pleasure and can challenge audiences), they are meant to be an entertaining activator.

Most commercially motivated franchised heroes are created on a *give-them-what-they-want* base: the heroic form (visuals, music, costumes, action scenes, etc.) predominates the heroic content or inspirational value. This could leave us with empty heroic shells where the cover is more important than the content. Without doubt the stunning high-quality visuals and action-driven plots attract audiences in sheer entertainment, admiration, and awe. In order to allow audiences to escape their reality even more, franchised heroes often operate in worlds that are only loosely based on ours as, for example, in *Gotham*, the *Xavier Institute for Higher Learning* or under the guidance of *S.H.I.E.L.D*. This brought Mann (2014) to conclude that we have reached a post ideological period in which the hero "no longer fights grand ideological struggles . . . nor does he fight political corruption or social enemies . . . Yet he is more grandly heroic" but without "any real world ideological agenda." Mann speaks of "virtual heroism" as the post ideological hero looks and acts like a hero but no longer acts as exemplary or for the *good* of others but only serves as escapist entertainment. Most franchised heroes, in his opinion, recycle the form and characteristics of heroes but do not have their inspiring force.

Hansen (2016) pointed out that the tension, and subsequent discussion, between the entertaining and inspirational values of heroes is not a recent phenomenon. According to Jacob and Raylor (1991), William Davenant, already in the 1650s, tried to build a public stage on which the visual splendour was intended to "civilize" the audience as Davenant sought: "Entertainment, where their Eyes might be subdu'd with Heroicall Pictures and change of Scenes, their Eares civiliz'd with Musick and wholsome discourses." Since the experienced sensations gradually became more

important than the narrative itself (Sobchack, 2006), the "attention re-focuses on the position and reaction of the audience" according to Hansen. This attention to audiences' reactions fuels the commercially motivated *give-them-what-they-want* concept but is also essential in hybrid heroism.

The search for impact is one of the few characteristics all heroes have in common. Although the discussion whether such "spectacle makes audiences passive, uncritical and open to totalitarian politics" (Jancovich, 2014, p. 70) will, I assume, never cease. The attractiveness of heroes and the reactions from audiences are tools that could - if overstretched - paradoxically strip the hero from his heroic and inspiring impact. According to Berman (2016) this is already the case as "the pendulum has swung so far that our heroes are straight-up villains … So why spend $14 at the movies if the big picture stirs up the same kind of existential anxieties one can get for free by glancing at CNN or Fox News? ... there's something about this reflection of dark times that audiences demand to witness onscreen" (51).

Because I believe fictional heroes are connected with their contexts, I assume that the form of the hero will change in the future, as it has done in the past. Yet, I do believe that the hybrid hero will remain a recurring character in narratives to come, as it seems that previous concepts leave traces in future developments.

If the heroic actions overshadow the moral goal, heroes are empty shells who do not evoke empathy. Morality is essential in heroism as it steers and motivates the actions of a hero. Without moral reflection, the unique heroic ingredient is lost. The fact that hybrid heroes add counter exemplary morality, draws the attention of audiences and leaves creators with possibilities to generate a more profound impact.
We cannot, on the other hand, predict how long hybrid heroes will play a role in fiction, how long audiences will love what they hate, or long for this counter-example.

Conclusion

Overtime, the status and agency of fictional heroes underwent formal and substantial changes; leading up to—what I define as—hybrid heroes. The hybrid hero is a contemporary fictional figure consisting of both heroic and villainous characteristics that grew from earlier MAC's.

Hybrid heroes are a seductive narrative tool to:
a) generate empathy and reflection within audiences, and

b) for creators to develop gripping narratives that challenge moral paradigms, heroism, and empathy.

As creators react to their society, contemporary interpretations of heroism like the poignant hybrid hero should not surprise us. Since 9/11, the world order (how symbolic or artificial it may have been) has been mixed up and has undergone drastic changes, this had profound impact on the creation and development narratives. (see among others, Moïsi 2016)

The hybrid hero is a sign of the times and in its own - often disturbing - way renders entertainment plus morality. Due to the specific sort of actions hybrid heroes undertake, they try to make sense of a world in transformation and provide a try-out for audiences. These try-outs are not searching to confirm good and evil, but are exactly there to question such clear-cut moral division. It is fascinating that the real world steers both which characters are developed and what attracts audiences in the fictional world.

The success and popularity of hybrid heroes is based on different elements; the alleged harmlessness of fiction, the shared ethical wishes from audiences and protagonists, the formal tools of narrating (contextualisation, tunnel vision), the appearance and features of the hero (boldness, humour, strength, wit, …).

The hybrid hero functions on asking questions, on disturbance, on malicious pleasures, on ambiguity and therefore searches discussions and controversy. This in contrast to the franchised hero who lets audiences dream away, escape the daily chaos and mayhem. On a moral level, the franchised hero confirms the clear-cut morality of good and evil, while the hybrid hero confirms the chaos, the immorality (sometimes the amorality) and thus the fluid morality. In this sense, the concept of the hybrid hero opposes Tsay-Vogel et al. (2016) who claim that "If you show characters doing a morally ambiguous action, but you don't focus on the altruism behind it, or if the outcome is negative, you are not going to get people to like the characters or enjoy what they are seeing because they can't justify the characters' actions" as the hybrid hero presents fictional characters who are not altruistic and yet they are welcomed with empathic reactions from audiences. It seems that audiences adapt either their moral paradigms or ignore them while encountering such narratives. In either case, audiences are morally off guard and are seduced, be it through the charismatic heroic features or due to the shared unethical wishes which can be safely tried out.

Both the franchised and the hybrid hero face challenges in the near future. At the risk of falling victim to uniformity and a one-size-fits-all treatment, numerous franchised heroic movies will see light in the years to come (over 40 *DC and Marvel* superheroes movies will be made between 2014 and

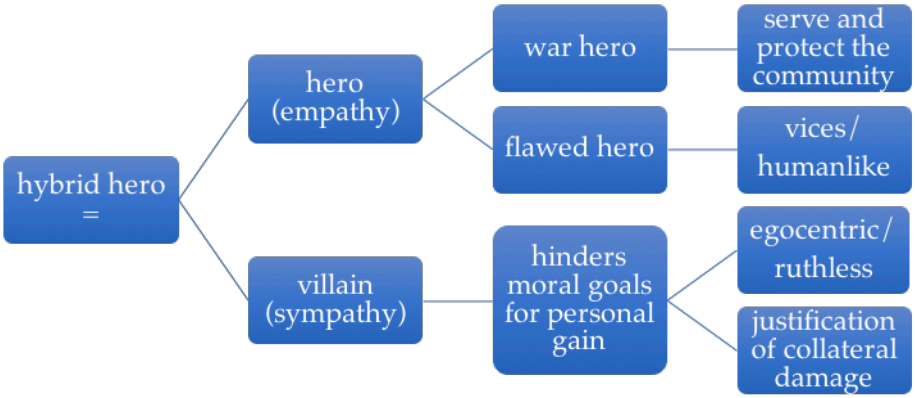
2019).[58] The commercialisation of such war-heroes could result in downgrading the inspirational element of heroism, as the heroic actions and audio-visual effects mainly focus on entertainment and could leave us with empty shells that no longer evoke empathy.
The same goes for the hybrid hero who, due to his ambiguous nature, may prove to be a temporary phenomenon. It is, for now, impossible to predict his expiry date due to his clear connections with reality and the need from creators. The moment reality changes the fictional heroes will do too, thus, the future of the hybrid hero depends on what happens in the real world. (Besides, the fact that hybrid heroes challenge the instructional function of exemplary heroes and narratives could backfire as audiences no longer trust these heroes or no longer want to be confronted with moral decline.)

The hybrid hero can be defined as:

a character that combines features from both heroes and villains. The interplay between these two sets of features leads to ambiguous empathy and strong reactions from the audience since controversial and polarizing opinions are what creators of hybrid heroes search for. Hybrid heroes actively raise questions on the function and the means of narratives and bring morality back to the centre of narratives.

[58] *Source*. http://screenrant.com/dc-marvel-movie-schedule-2015-2020/

1.5.6. Scheme towards (and features) of the hybrid hero



Features of the Hybrid Hero:

- Is a contemporary interpretation of fictional heroes
- Can be created by changing only a few, virtues of the classic hero
- Is both transactional and transformational
- The goal is not to help others, but oneself
- Holds appeal because audiences can share the same un-ethical wishes
- Holds appeal because of his formalistic features (humour, eloquence, etc.)
- Follows *wrong* moralities in a *good* heroic way
- Aspires *good* causes through *wrong* behaviour
- Focuses on audiences and their reactions:
  by presenting counter-examples audiences are forced to reflect on examples
- Wants to inflict controversy and controversial reactions
- Evokes moral reflection (intended or not)
- Uses and *plays* with empathy
- Challenges classic views on heroes and villains and thus on their narratives
- Challenges classic views on morality through narratives

Hybrid heroes speaking:

Frank Underwood:

So, yes, I'm guilty as hell, but then so are all of you.
Yes, the system is corrupt, but you wanted a guardian at the gate like me.
And why? Because you know I will do whatever it takes.
And you have all enjoyed it, been party to it and benefited by it.
Oh, don't deny it.
You've loved it.
You don't actually need me to stand for anything.
You just need me to stand.
To be the strong man.
The man of action.
My God, you're addicted to action and slogans.
It doesn't matter what I say.
It doesn't matter what I do.
Just as long as I'm doing something, you're happy to be along for the ride.
And frankly, I don't blame you.
With all the foolishness and indecision in your lives,
why not a man like me? I don't apologise.
In the end, I don't care whether you love me or you hate me,
just as long as I win.
The deck is stacked.
The rules are rigged.
Welcome to the death of the Age of Reason.

Chapter 64 (Wright, 2017)

Rodrigo Borgia:

Regrets? Sure.
Regrets it fucking didn't work out as it could have.
Regrets I waited for … people
And therefore, missed the chance to do it all, at once.
Regrets I was too subtle, to sweet, to nice.
Regrets I did not fuck, drink enough.
But if you ask me if I regret hurting others, or my insatiable lust
Then I ask you, Why? Why should I?
Do I regret the betrayal of my son? Immensely.
Would I do anything different if I had the chance?
I am born and I will die, in between lies a waterfall of desire, hunger, trying, wanting, daring and dreaming.
Do not write about live, jump in it!
And yes, I'll die, go back to your beds and sleep.
The bad guy is dead.

Borgia Trilogy, Part III (Van Tourhout 2014-2016)

1.6. Appendix A: A short history of Empathy -- Neurology and Art

This chapter will shortly summarise earlier and current viewpoints on empathy.

The word empathy (or *einfühlung*) was first used by Friedrich Theodor Visher and later by his son Robert Vischer in 1873 who linked empathy with the Arts in his *On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics.* By doing so Robert Vischer ignited the discussion on the correlation between the arts and empathy. Titchener (1909) translated *einfühuing* as empathy and a new term for an old concept was born. Soon the term and concept was further researched by psychologists like Wundt, Lipps, Freud and more recently by Piaget, Rogers and De Waal.

But even before the term empathy emerged its content and meaning (feeling *for*, feeling *as*) was already discussed as e.g. David Hume (2009 [1740]) claimed that "the minds of men are mirrors to one another, not only because they reflect each other's emotions, but also because those rays of passions, sentiments, and opinions may be often reverberated, and may decay away by insensible degrees." Adam Smith (2009 [1759]) for his part stated that "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it."
And later the poet Shelley wrote in his *A defence of Poetry* (1909[1840]) that "A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasure of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination." From an evolutionary point of view Darwin (2004 [1871]) adds the social value of sympathy (and empathy) stating "the social instincts lead an animal to take pleasure in the society of its fellows, to feel a certain amount of sympathy with them, and to perform various services for them." and that "sympathy, … forms an essential part of the social instinct, and is indeed its foundation-stone." Based on these and other theses on empathy its pro-social benefits are clear, the concept of perspective taking is seen as beneficial and essential to evolution.

Empathy has been defined as "the social-emotional response that is induced by the perception of another person's affective state, [it] is a fundamental component of emotional experience, and plays a vital role in social interaction" according to Szalavitz and Perry (2010).
Empathy is based on the mirroring process, which evolves into a likewise emotional and mental state of another. This, in its own turn, (as far as we

know today) is believed to stem from mirror neurons which work on a combination of emotional and cognitive partaking.

The influence of psychologist Carl Rogers on empathy as subject and its spreading, can hardly be overestimated. The perception of oneself and others is essential in Rogers' work, as he believed that every individual had the capacity of a positive development. It is, however, crucial to allow such developments to take place through e.g. the encouragement of children, acceptance, openness. According to Rogers genuineness, positiveness and empathy are needed to achieve just that (1959). Therefore, Rogers (1975) saw empathy as an on-going "process" in social interaction with others and the self: "It involves being sensitive, moment to moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever, that he/she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments, sensing meanings of which he/she is scarcely aware ... to be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter another world without prejudice... ". (p. 4)
Rogers believed that if one was treated with empathy this would in its own turn lead to empathy. I made a similar remark on the effect of fictional heroes: if a hero acts empathically, chances are high that audiences will develop empathy for that hero. Could it be that empathy stimulates mirroring and that those who value empathy are the same who like to mirror, to perform or try-out, other lives?

Rogers' concept still holds interest today as his idea of process; being aware of others, see the world through other eyes has become what one can understand as being empathic. Why we developed empathy, the moral implications, the relation between affective and cognitive empathy etc. are less clear and leave room for discussion within different fields of research (among others Neurology, Biology, Psychology, the Arts).

Kahneman (2013) believes, as Kohlberg, that the process of experiences becomes the story. He sees two ways of selves, the experiencing self (who lives in the present moment) and the remembering self (who creates stories from the experiences); in his opinion, the theatre answers both selves as we go to the theatre for its immediate and direct experiences and its anticipated memories. This brings Hurley (2010) to conclude that the emotions felt when watching theatre only exist because of our memories as they shape who we are and determine how we interpret the performance. These empathic emotions are the "major reason" to attend the cultural events because of the "emotionally rewarding".

Just as with most scientific research each one stands on the shoulders of others, in the following pages a summarised reconstruction.
Hoffman (1977, 1985, 1987, 2000) sees empathy mainly as a pro-social interaction and connects both affective and cognitive empathy with morality and altruism.
Eisenberg (1983) from her part focussed on the affective empathy and found that gender has a genuine impact on the levels of empathy but also - as Rogers - that children who receive empathic reactions are more likely to act in a more empathic and helpful manner than those experiencing distress (Eisenberg, Lennon and Fabes, 1983, 1990, 2002). After years of research, it is believed that, pro-social behaviour can be learned and is therefore a fluent process.
Batson (1991, 2002) focussed on the motives and reasoning that leads to empathy and social interaction. He mainly worked on the altruistic motivations of empathy, whereby the ultimate benefit (helping others versus helping oneself) stood central. Batson believes that the empathic motivation can be truly altruistic in his empathy-altruism hypothesis, and that the possible self-benefits are not the motivation but can be an expected personal reward.
Davis developed his IRI (Interpersonal Reactivity Index, 1980) to measure individual differences in empathic responses as he sees differences in cognitive role taking and affective reactivity.[59] Davis (1983) sees empathy as a multidimensional phenomenon whereby perspective taking, fantasy, empathic concern and personal distress all play their specific and reciprocal role. Fantasy is an important element within this research project as it measures the engagement and levels of transposition into fictional characters in movies, books and plays.

Although empathy became a buzzword in recent years its meaning and value is still discussed: it evokes discussion on what perspective taking, emotions, similarity, morality can effectuate within the *sender* and the *receiver*.

1.6.1. Neurology Art?

In the middle of this research process I needed some scientific objectivity in order to shed some light on the matter. I turned to the neurological research, as this research leaves out attributions, opinions and self-corrections of participants, linguists or creators. Next to that I felt the need for hard data on these matters since both the believers (e.g. Nussbaum) and the non-believers (e.g. Keen) fell victim to generalising their personal opinions.

[59] The Test can be found via:
http://fetzer.org/sites/default/files/images/stories/pdf/selfmeasures/EMPATHY-InterpersonalReactivityIndex.pdf

Although research in this field is still scarce we do have some research on Visual Arts and Music at hand. We can assume that similar processes occur in the theatre, and in order to partially answer this research project I worked together intensely with the Laboratory of Neuro- and Psychophysiology of the University of Leuven. We researched levels of arousal and involvement in different settings (theatre, registration, lab) in different constellations (watching in group and watching individually), and with different levels of pre-knowledge and anticipation. The results of our findings will be published in the near future.

In recent years there has been much debate concerning mirror neurons. This type of neurons is believed to be essential in mirroring others emotional state, feeling *as* another, to *live in* another. But it took until 2010 to actually prove their existence. According to Keysers and Gazzola "We now know that humans have mirror neurons, … they could help the brain perform an inner simulation of other people's actions while at the same time selectively blocking overt motor output and disambiguate who performed the action." This connects empathy with mirror neurons on two levels:
a) we are able to mirror a *state* of another,
and b) we are likewise able to block this mirroring depending on who the other is. This means that we are able to empathise but choose who *receives* our empathy.

It all started when Giacomo Rizzolatti and his team (at the University of Parma) experimented on macaque monkeys and implanted their brains with electrodes. During the research, they discovered that the premotor cortex of the macaque was activated while grabbing a nut but also that, if the macaque *saw* another monkey take a nut the same premotor cortex was activated. This type of neurological activation was soon to be labelled as mirror neurons (a neurological reaction *as if* one does an action whilst only witnessing the action).

At first the idea of mirror neurons was received with scepticism as Rizzolatti remembered how "*Nature* rejected our paper for its "lack of general interest"." But Rizzolatti and his team persisted and "To our surprise we found that some F5 neurons discharged not when the monkey looked at the food, but when the experimenter grasped it. The mirror mechanism was discovered."[60]

[60] F5 is located in the premotor cortex of the macaque brain, a cortical region important for the planning, preparation, and selection of movements and coordinated actions, … Area F5 has physiological properties relevant to the neural control of mouth and hand movements, especially grasping (Source: Iacoboni, M.
Imitation, Empathy, and Mirror Neurons. *The Annual Review of Psychology*, 60:653–70, 2009)

Rizzolatti (2014) predicts that the finding of mirror neurons will "impact on disciplines outside neurosciences, such as psychology, ethology, sociology and philosophy, or that they would interest novelists (e.g. *The elegance of the hedgehog*) and laymen." As this mirroring-ability leads to a form of empathy but also has its worth in learning processes (imitation, learn from experiences by others, etc.). Therefore, the mirror neurons already found their way in art-Therapy (as e.g. Dance-Movement Therapy [61])

Although there is still a lot of work to do concerning the function, origin and embedded brain processes, mirror neurons are nowadays seen as scientifically verifiable and accepted. One recurring remark concerns the type of empathy, as it seems - for now - that mirror neurons mainly work on affective empathy (sharing of emotions) and less on cognitive empathy (take the perspective of others). Baron-Cohen (2011) assumes that mirror neurons are essential but not solely responsible for empathy, therefore he speaks of an "empathy circuit" whereby different regions in the brain are activated and that: "these regions vary in activity in different individuals according to the person's particular level of empathy supports the idea of empathy varying like a dimmer control. And it gives us a direct way of explaining why people who for different reasons (people with autism, or Asperger syndrome, or one or other of the personality disorders) have little or no empathy."

According to Paul Zak (2012) this neurological response is partly connected to the hormone oxytocin which is present in men and women and is e.g. released when breastfeeding. The oxytocin hormones are released when we see another in pain or distress. Therefore, Zak speaks of a human oxytocin medicated empathy home circuit. "Observing another person's distress catches our attention, and we experience some of what they're experiencing. This can cause oxytocin release, but not if our own distress is above a certain threshold. Nature assumes that if we're in dire strait ourselves, we can't so easily afford to invest time and resources in helping another. High stress block oxytocin release".
Iacoboni (2009) states, in line with De Waal (2009) that empathy is - due to the mirror neurons and hormonal production - a result of evolutionary survival skills of humans and primates: "The evolutionary process made us wired for empathy. … the research on mirror neurons, imitation, and empathy, in contrast, tells us that our ability to empathise, a building block of our sociality and morality has been built "bottom up" from relatively simple mechanisms of action production and perception."

[61] See also: Cynthia F. Berrol, Neuroscience meets dance/movement therapy: Mirror neurons, the therapeutic process and empathy, *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, Volume 33, Issue 4, 2006, Pages 302–315

Important for this research project is not only the fact that we are able to mirror the emotions and actions of others but also that we are able to *decline* or *refuse* to mirror others. This explains why certain narratives or characters receive mixed receptions, but on the other hand present a challenge for creators.

Mirror neurons and Art?
Since audiences are able to feel *as* the characters they encounter in books, movies, TV-series and theatre we can assume that mirror neurons are at work while engaging narratives. If we indeed are able to mirror an action performed by another than the Performing Arts should be the zenith of art and empathy.

Amy Cook (2007) said: "Since watching is - at least for some neurons - the same as doing, drama *inspires* the imitation of an action rather than *being* an imitation of an action." Cooks sees three possible results of this mirroring: audiences understand the goal of the character, audiences develop a mental simulation to mirror the expressed emotions and audiences react by performing physical actions as an answer to the performed actions on stage, claiming that "It is the power and pervasiveness of *audience* imitation that is central to theatre".

Freedberg and Gallese (2007) revealed that by seeing artistic representations we develop an "embodied simulation, a functional mechanism through which the actions, emotions or sensations we see activate our own internal representations of the body states … as if we were engaged in a similar action or experiencing a similar emotion or sensation." In their research on these simulated emotions they found that with Michelangelo's *Prisoners* those who watched "felt activation of the muscles that appear to be activated within the sculpture itself", the same effect was seen with Goya's *Desastres de la Guerra* where bodily empathy arises not only in responses to the many unbalanced figures, where "viewers seem to have similar feelings of unbalance themselves". They found that such mirroring reactions are also occurring in response to "the experience of architectural forms, such as a twisted Romanesque column. With abstract paintings such as those by Jackson Pollock viewers often experience a sense of bodily involvement with the movements that are implied". Freedberg and Gallese conclude that an empathic reaction to art arises from "direct experiential understanding of objects and the inner world of others."

Thus, it seems that empathy is neurologically measurable and that it works on imagining an action or a situation; this knowing however does not mean that we know how to inflict, create or develop empathy.

Appendix B: Liking is Agreeing?

> "[o]ur emotions and desires about both fictional and nonfictional characters are intimately tied to our judgments of them; and our ethical responses to narrative, as we have seen, are tied both to the ethical quality of characters actions and to the interaction of our own ethical positions with the ethics of technique and the ethical positions of the implied author."
> (*Living to Tell About It*, James Phelan)

Zillmann and Cantor (1972, 1975) developed the Affective Dispositional Theory (ADT) which explains the relation between audience and narrative and whereby *liking* and *caring* are essential to accept the hero and his or her actions and moral beliefs. The ADT theory works on the correlation between the spectators' beliefs and those of the fictional characters and can be seen as a modern-day version of what Aristotle stated in his Poetica (when claiming that in the end, villains should be punished and heroes be rewarded). Janicke and Raney (2017) describe ADT as "the process of narrative enjoyment in general and for traditional crime-punishment narratives in particular. According to ADT, the enjoyment of stories centered around crime and punishment is derived from positive dispositions toward the protagonist (and negative dispositions toward the antagonist), which are based on moral evaluations of the characters. Put simply, characters motivated and behaving in morally correct ways are liked to a varying degree, whereas characters motivated and acting in morally improper ways are disliked to a similarly varying degree. Traditionally, ADT has been used to explain the enjoyment of traditional hero narratives. The theory's application to and explanatory power with stories featuring virtuous protagonists is self-evident: Heroes are morally upright and, therefore, loved. Villains are morally bankrupt and, thus, despised."

Important within this research project, however, is the recent shift Janicke and Raney discussed: "In the past few years, though, entertainment researchers have turned their attention to the appeal and enjoyment of so-called antihero narratives, those featuring protagonists whose conduct is at best morally ambiguous, questionable, and at times unjustifiable. These characters challenge the basic ADT explanation of enjoyment. While traditional heroes are morally pure, antiheroes are morally complex. They generally display hero-like characteristics for which they are admired, but simultaneously act in ways that can also be regarded as morally questionable and bad. … Jack Bauer, Tony Soprano, The Dark Knight, Lisbeth Salander . . . the list of these characters as featured in TV-series and motion pictures is endless. From an ADT standpoint, such characters -

because of their moral flaws - should be met with less positive dispositions than those in traditional hero narratives, resulting in less enjoyment. However, personal experience tells us and recent research has supported that antihero narratives are greatly enjoyed, sometimes even more than hero narratives."

Since liking was essential it became clear to me that the *form* of the character helped into accepting its moral behaviour, that form was a lubricant to propose moral concepts. This made clear why audiences go along with villains as Richard III or in my case Gilles de Rais or Rodrigo Borgia. The *cool*-factor of a villain is a tool to inflict empathy and moral acceptance. ADT also explains why audiences are able *not* to feel for someone in a narrative; if the context is shaped in such a manner that audiences are not supposed to root with character Y then his or her emotions will not be empathically mirrored.

Later, Zillmann and Bryant (1994) claimed that: "[audience] enjoyment is high when characters who are liked experience positive outcomes" and "characters who are disliked experience negative outcomes", this is similar to the cathartic effects from Aristotle the good are rewarded and the bad are punished (Poetica). But it goes further because it seems that audiences are enjoying the misfortune of those characters they do not *like*.
Zillmann et al. see three elements that influence the moral perception:
a) the liking of a character (approval of the characters' behaviour and motivation),
b) the anticipatory hopes and fears (virtuous characters will be rewarded while vicious characters will be punished)
and c) the ultimate outcome renders pleasure and enjoyment (if the expected justice is similar to the justice outcome in the narrative).

This conclusion is not as innocent as it seems. If we accept the idea that *liked* characters who affirm what *we* accept as morally correct will lead to a positive evaluation this does hold some challenging dangers and commercial strategies. It certainly explains target-audiences and the predictability of certain heroic genres. It also explains why audiences agree with certain paradigms in narratives, as audiences like those characters who confirm their opinions. In this sense, narratives and heroes are not only a mirror for society but can also be a triggering boomerang that confirms what audiences already believe.

A fascinating example of such a like-confirm relation can be found in the character of Archie Bunker, a right winged conservative who has a clear racist and sexist point of view. The creator, Norman Lear, believed (or at least hoped) that his exaggeration of such viewpoints would inflict humour

but also raise awareness. Unexpectedly, those viewers who shared the viewpoint of Bunker seemed to miss the irony and critique Lear muffed away in this series. According to Viedmar en Rokeach (1974) those who agreed with Bunker valued the series higher than those who morally oppose; the series evoked a reversed effect than was intended.

As important are the possible side effects of such empathic partaking within audiences. This was what Raney and Bryant (2002) researched while stretching the ADT-model. Raney and Bryant researched how audiences evaluated the actions of heroes in narratives and what the impact of such evaluations was on their enjoyment. They drew from the idea that the "macrostory of all drama seems to be that all injustice necessarily results in some restoration of justice; therefore, for every crime there must exist at least one, but possibly more than one, attempt at retribution." (p. 404) But if "retribution is either unsuccessfully sought or not sought at all, the presence of no resolution is also a statement about justice … the nonretribution is the retribution, and the viewer can ascertain a subsequent statement on justice." (p. 404).
The absence of retribution, catharsis or reflections, thus, speaks as *loud* as a clear-cut moral. This means that the absence of moral can lead to an emphasis on the moral – this absence or even glorification of nonretribution is essential in the hybrid hero. This nonretribution shifts the focus and responsibility towards the audience; his or her notions of justice will be challenged as the level of enjoyment/agreement comes down to the "degree of correspondence between the viewer's sense of justice and the statement about justice made in the drama." (p. 407).

Raney and Bryant formulate their ideas in a model based on the affect and cognitive effects of the audience (=audience input) combined with the characters and their justice sequence (=message input) leading to a judgement of characters: the closer the correlation, the higher the level enjoyment will be. This means that creators could come up with narratives that "maximize enjoyment" (p. 409) if the punishment in the narrative is what audiences see as fit and if the portrayal of justice is like that of the audience.

Thus, Raney and Bryant come to the same toxic conclusion as Zillmann, that audiences will praise those narratives that confirm their beliefs. The whole idea that art can lead to moral change seems no longer applicable. This is a dangerous assumption even if it does increase enjoyment; it would bring us to an art that *gives what audiences want*. The arts, would in this case, no longer be a reflector but evolve into the *slave* of audiences' wishes.
(further reading could include: The level of suspense (Zillmann, 1980; Zillmann, Hay, & Bryant, 1975), level of anxiety (Bryant, Carveth, & Brown,

1981) and the viewer's apprehension towards crime and fear of victimisations (Wakshlag, Vial, & Tamborini, 1983; Zillmann & Wakshlag, 1985).
(Within the scheme below, *Justice* is understood as agreeing with the actions and eventual outcome)

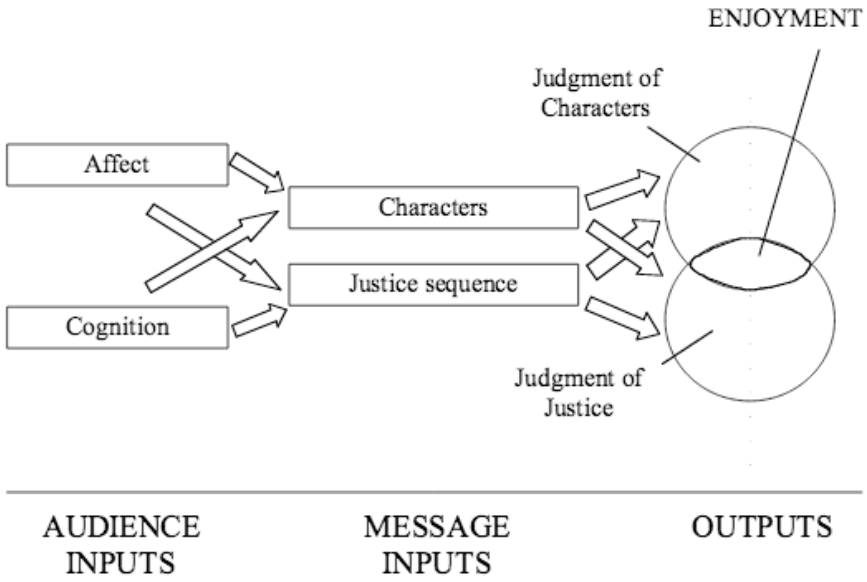


Figure 1. Integrated model of enjoyment for crime drama.

source: Journal of Communication, 2002 (p. 408)

Tal-Or and Cohen (2010) focussed on how such audience involvement manifested itself and saw two elements: the audience is at the same time "external observer" and "participant" (p. 403); these two positions are not static and intertwine constantly during the experience. The empathy or involvement audiences develop is traceable on two levels, according to Tal-Or and Cohen: Identification and Transportation.
Both elements involve "a loss of awareness of the viewing situation and a shift in identity" but each has a unique focus as "identification describes a relationship with a specific character, transportation is a more general experience created by the narrative as a whole" (p. 404). We could state that identification works on the development and absorption of an emotional

connection while transportation works on meta-narrative elements as suspense and the unity of perspectives between character and viewer.
This duality explains why we can be engaged with e.g. villainous narratives without strong identification: the action, the suspense leading to affect predominates the emotional rapport. (e.g. action movies, thrillers, detective). Although both could, theoretically, exist apart it is the reciprocal vice versa that strengthens the empathic rapport.
Tal-Or and Cohen further researched whether background, positive bias, revealing future events were tools to increase empathy. It seems that "emotional connection with the character is an antecedent of identification" (p. 413) and thus that background is an emotional trigger to provide an emotional bond. Next to that it seems perfectly possible for audiences to identify with the hero even in the negative condition (p. 414).
When narratives start Medias Res then audiences will have to evaluate and re-consider their empathic rapport in a later stage of the narrative, audience will either postpone or adapt their empathic connection. This could explain why Medias Res narratives often start with strong emotional scenes whereby immediate affect is sought as can be seen in e.g. the opening scenes *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg, 1998) or in classics as *The Divine Comedy*, or *Odyssey*.

This brings me to conclude that the opinions on the hero have less effect than the hero's actions when identifying. And that tools as background, contextualisation can lead to empathy even though the actions themselves may feel ambiguous. When evaluating or empathising with heroes, their actions (what they do) are decisive.

Moral implications?
Bruner (1990) used the word *Perfink* to pinpoint the different layers of communication with fictional characters stemming from the words *Per*ceive, *F*eel and Th*ink* (p. 93). While Nunning (2015), claims that fiction "leaves traces in readers' minds and influences their cognitive abilities." due to the persuasive power of (untrue) fiction and the subsequent improvement in understanding the self and others.

Mental simulation is essential in social interaction: reading, acting, empathising with characters is presumably a key-factor in developing interactions and formulate plans for the future. The simulation effects are essential in the trial and error learning of humans (Oatley, 2002, p. 41). Engaging in narratives allows us to situate ourselves in situations and periods, meet characters and their viewpoints we would never meet in real life because we would evade such situations, oppose to such characters or be ignorant of their existence. Such "spontaneous perspective taking" (Johnson et al. 593) is essential in empathic reactions and leads to a try-out or

simulation of other perspectives and moral paradigms which in their own turn lead to improved cognitive abilities as one needs to follow, share and reflect on other ways of thinking and feeling according to Nunning (2014).

This is one of the topics we will research in the case study *Each One Alone* (2018) whereby different parts of the audience will receive different pieces of information (background, context, emotional parcours) through separate monologues, only to learn afterwards that what they heard is not necessarily true. Because of that audiences will have to re-evaluate their former empathy towards a character. We will thus actively *play* with such shifting focalisations.

I turn once again to Raney and Shafer (2011, 2012) who came up with new insights on narrative enjoyment and approval. They asked themselves whether the process of liking, agreeing and empathising was limited to heroes.
A surprising result came from the empirical research conducted on the enjoyment and approval of *Jack Bauer*, the protagonist in the TV-series, *24*. (2012)
They found that fan enjoyment increased (as expected) in relation to feelings of sympathy toward Bauer. However, they (unexpectedly) found that enjoyment increased the more *un*attractive and *im*moral the fans rated Bauer.
Thus, fan enjoyment increased the less attractive, the less moral, but the more sympathetic they found the protagonist" (Shafer and Raney, 2012, p. 1031). These findings not only are contradicting the ADT theory but seem highly illogical, as enjoyment and moral approval have been seen as each other's preconditions. Shafer and Raney believe that this new form of attributing counter-enjoyment is only possible after a learning process. This would mean that engaging with villains, flawed heroes (or hybrid heroes for that matter) is something that must be developed. Shafer and Raney believe that it is reasonable to believe that we "use moral disengagement strategies to maintain positive dispositions towards our narrative friend".
These findings have been extremely important within my research and have played a role in developing the hybrid hero-concept.

This means that audiences, in order to identify and empathise with such characters must "take off the default lens of moral scrutiny and put on one of moral permissiveness and justification" (ibid, p. 1038). Bandura (1991) stated that audiences are "reconstructing conduct, obscuring causal agency, disregarding or misinterpreting injurious consequences, and blaming and devaluating the victims" (p. 67) for the sake of enjoyment.
More recently Eden and Daalmans (2016) came to similar conclusions whereby the conflicted morality of narratives should or could lead to a

higher appreciation and therefore to more reflective processes. Simply stated: the more we like the immoral characters the more we are willing to reflect on the narrative. This last concept not only felt refreshing but was important as it explained the complex, fascinating discussion emerging when confronted with multi-layered characters as the hybrid hero.
I believe that heroes reap what they saw. If they are complex they will receive complex reception while clear-cut heroes will be evaluated on a more binary like/dislike basis.

This brings me to conclude that audiences have learned to enjoy moral flaw and have accepted that the forbidden fruit is an essential part of that enjoyment. Enjoying the wrong is enjoyable because:
a) it is not commonly allowed,
b) the protagonist is liked and admired because of a shared wrong ethics,
c) the behaviour and motives are seen with positive bias
and d) the wrong actions are whitewashed in retrospect.

These findings have been extremely important within my research and have played a role in developing the hybrid hero-concept.

Enjoying empathy?

According to Oatley (1994) there are basically four responses when confronted with fiction:
a) new material leads to curiosity and assimilation,
b) a dishabituation leads to accommodation of schemata,
c) spectator enters the story leading to sympathy/empathy
and d) through personal memories identification with the characters can occur.

Oatley thus sees two directions:
The material *enters* the audience - assimilation (external) - or the audience *enters* the material - accommodation of the narrative (internal).
Audiences adopt a character's goal and use the planning procedures and form mental models of the imagined world. Audiences receive (speech) acts from the writer (and performers), which leads to a combined and integrated unified experience. (p. 53)

This unified experience arises from the process T.S. Eliot (1953 [1919]) describes; he believed that creators imagine and that audiences re-imagine these worlds and circumstances. I would like to add that this re-imagination is more than a mirroring of the creator's world but an augmented and personal version based upon the presented fiction.

This means that the narrative evokes empathy within audiences but that the audiences projects their personal convictions, beliefs and backgrounds. Empathy, in this sense is, much more than sharing an emotion, but is an interpretation and a personal completion to a fictional narrative. It is an answer (in the broadest sense) to the creator.

Oatley (1994) sees what he calls the *Grisham* effect, whereby creators appeal to the curiosity through e.g. incompleteness. But the arousal caused by curiosity and/or anxiety (the transportation-level) leaves audiences "scarcely moved by any personal meanings … you will be much the same person as when you started." (p. 57-58). The enjoyment and empathy has only effect in relation to the narrative, once the experience is finished the emotional rapport is no longer needed as the curiosity or anxiety has been solved within the narrative. Oatley, therefore, presents us with the *Amis* effect, and draws from the work of Schlovsky (1917) who argued that art should make the habitual strange or de-familiarised.
Brecht, in his own way, played with such alienation effects. Such *Amis* effects provide arousal as they challenge:
a) known structures and paradigms,
b) to understand the differences between what is expected and what is presented in the narrative,
and c) allow audiences to develop new and more conscious associations (p. 59).
It is clear that Oatley prefers the de-familiarisation narratives as they deconstruct known paradigms and thus focus on audiences' reception.

There are many opinions on how emotions can and should work within audiences - the following three are more or less summarising the common concepts:
a) T.S. Eliot sees *sympathy* as the connector with audiences: audiences connect with the characters and their circumstances,
b) The sympathy/empathy audiences develop makes them not only understand the fictional characters but could improve their understanding of those in the real world, and
c) the process of seeing the world through other perspectives is essential.

Stanislawski worked intensively with *emotional memories* to invoke both empathy within audiences and identification within the performers. Stanislawksi proposes that performers should use their own personal memories as input for their characters so that they can be relived on stage. Stanislawski emphasises that personal memories should not be used directly but as an inner stimulus, because the emotional memory is a "kind of synthesis of memory on a large scale. It is purer, more condensed, compact, substantial and sharper than the actual happenings." It was Strasberg who,

later, developed the "affective memory" rather than the emotional memory of Stanislawski,
I would like to add that performers then should be encouraged to experience as much emotional and situational states as possible. If emotional memory is what performers must draw from then their memories-reservoir should be abundantly filled and constantly refreshed both in drama schools and during their careers.

Flaubert, from his part saw *identification* as the tool to bond with audiences. He wrote in a letter to Louise Colet (23 December 1853) "It is a delicious thing to write, to be no longer yourself but to move in an entire universe of your own creating. Today, for instance, as man and woman, both lover and mistress, I rode in a forest on an autumn afternoon under the yellow leaves, and I was also the horses, the leaves, the wind, the words my people uttered, even the red sun that made them almost close their love-drowned eyes." Identification occurs within writers, performers and audiences and seems to, at least partially, based on imagination and the mirror-neurons. The inner simulation of other's feelings and emotional effects not only internalises fiction but *practices* try-outs of the other.

Whatever the opinion on how empathy is best evoked the result is more or less the same: The spectator can adopt one goal of another, and be curious or develop predictions on the outcome. By doing so the spectator creates an imagined world, which combines the ingredients provided by the creator and those of the spectator. Empathy thus comes down to a construction by audiences based upon the construction creators present.
That identifying with others through narratives could lead to social interaction in the real world, can be seen in the study conducted by Igartua (2010) on the persuasive effects of identification. These results, concerning the incidental persuasive impact of exposure to a feature film, showed that "exposure to a feature film presenting a positive image of immigrants caused a change in the attitudes and beliefs regarding that group (hypothesis 4), and this effect was explained by identification with the characters of that film (hypothesis 5)." This is consistent with the findings of historian Lynn Hunt (2000), who believed that the novel in the 18th century "disseminated a new psychology and a new social and political order", that narratives basically "made the point that all selves are fundamentally similar because of their inner psychic processes." (p.14) Due to an empathy with previously unknown characters, Hunt believes a form of equality and connection arises, the fictional characters are "in some fundamental way like you" (p.13) and because are favoured by spectators.

There is, thus, reason to accept that identification and empathic bonds with fictional characters not only render pleasure, enjoyment and moral reflection

but that it promotes social interaction as after-effect. (The power and length of such after-effects is still to be researched.)

(Further reading could include: Raymond A., Oatley K., & Peterson J.B.. (2009), Green, M. C., Brock C.T. & Kaufman G.F., (2004), Goldman, A. I. (2009), Schacter, D. L, Addis D.R. & Buckner R.L., (2007))

“Previous research has predominantly focused on the reception histories of individual heroic figures. Moreover, such research often suffers from a presentist perspective, as it tends to concentrate on the contemporary and locates its roots in the twentieth century only. However, the twentieth century can only be properly understood and critically evaluated if the deeper historical foundations of its concepts of the heroic are laid open. Furthermore, heroic figures have to be understood within their specific cultural, social and political contexts. Accordingly, the heroic has to be studied from a long-term perspective that is transculturally as well as synchronically and diachronically comparative.”

("Heroes - Heroizations - Heroisms. Transformations and Conjunctures from Antiquity to the Modern Day" - Collaborative Research Center 948 – University of Freiburg)

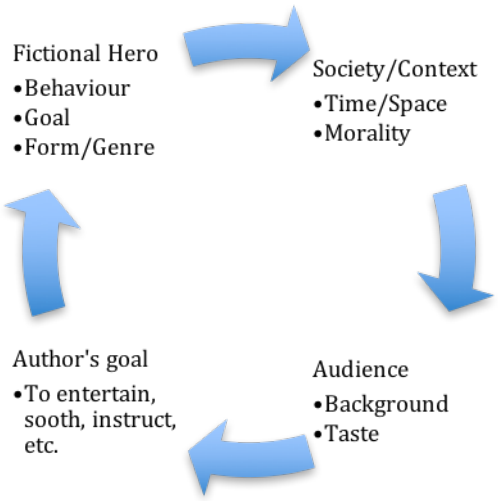
First Funding Period: July 2012 - June 2016 Research Program)
https://www.sfb948.uni-freiburg.de/kurzprofil-en/forschung/?page=1

Part II:

Onwards with the (Hybrid) Hero

This second part is more practice based and will discuss different tools which I developed or came across over the years and helped me develop (hybrid) heroes. The following should not be seen as a cookbook filled with clear-cut recipes, nor is it exhaustive or a *Heroism for Dummies* that one should follow step by step.
It is a personal selection of tools, ideas and concepts I believe to be useful when working with fictional heroes.

I hope they inspire both researchers and creators.



The rapport between (hybrid) hero, society and audience is a dynamic dance whereby behaviour, circumstances, characteristics, goal of the hero, form and genre of the narrative, the moral changes in society and the personal taste and background all are elements that influence back and forth the creation and appreciation of heroes.

The ambiguity of heroes works in two basic directions:
-the *search* for empathy (point of view of creator through behaviour, personality, etc.)
-the *acceptance* of empathy (point of view of audiences through relation, attribution, etc.)
Heroes exist by attribution, therefore among others; the genre, context, goal of the hero, circumstances and/or the actions are tools in the hands of creators in order to ignite an empathic (and/or moral) rapport.

These volatile elements give heroism its dynamics. According to Klapp (1948, p. 135) "the study of growing hero legends show us that the fame of a hero is a collective product, being largely a number of popular imputations and interpretations." Or: the hero of today may be the zero of tomorrow.

Different overlapping elements influence the creation of heroes and their empathic rapport, and will be discussed in the following pages.

2.1. Personality/Behaviour

Personality is the sum of what the characters *are* (physical appearance, morality, etc.). Behaviour concerns the way, characters *do* things (actions and reactions). Within fiction, characters need to prove their virtues through their actions.

Changing who we *are* is difficult, changing what we *do* is manageable and therefore heroes will mainly search for means to act rather than change their morality or values.
In most cases the personality will be the base from which heroes engage themselves, while their level of empathy will define the nature of their behaviour and actions.

Most heroic narratives search for the extra-ordinary whereby heroes are more persistent, altruistic, courageous, etc. than the audience, thus they are confronted with an *augmented* character – someone who may look like them but is not as them, yet allows empathy. This empathy arises through the actions of the heroes, fictional characters are both created and evaluated through their behaviour and actions – characters are what they do.
This can lead to emotional connections because of e.g. admiration and possibly the wish to mirror the hero, the enjoyment while experiencing the narrative. The same elements can alienate audiences if their expectations are not met and /or there is no common (back)ground with the hero's personality or behaviour.

Hybrid heroes take personality and behaviour to its maximum and because of that provoke discussion, which can be precisely the intention of their creators. Personality and behaviour are tools to create heroes.

Three tools to develop heroic characters will be discussed: the features by Kinsella et al. (2015), the Karpman triangle (2014) and Ofman's core quadrant (2006).

None of these elements were originally intended for creators, yet they proved to be workable tools when developing fictional heroes. The order in which these three tools are presented is no coincidence as the Kinsella features can be used to develop an ensemble of characters (archetypes, drivers and passengers) and to create the arena of the narrative, the Karpman triangle zooms in on inter-personal relation and helps developing specific scenes and act breaks, while the core quadrant works on a personal

level and helps developing strengths and flaws of an individual character in relation to others.

Heroic features

Kinsella et al. described heroes based on two sets of features; central and peripheral features. Although not intended to create heroes but to differentiate them, these two sets provide a workable way to create round heroic-characters and ensembles.
By combining the central and peripheral elements most types of heroism can be defined.

By attributing central labels to the different characters a team emerges, where after peripheral features can be assigned. The combination deepens the characters and allows an organic and heterogeneous ensemble. (Although the meaning of some labels overlaps, they do give the opportunity to attribute specific features, e.g. selfless and altruistic or being determined and having conviction are labels that can overlap but are not similar)

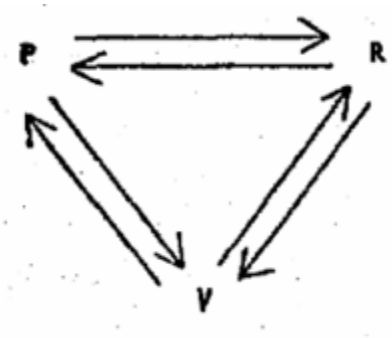
Hybrid features?

As shown in Part I, Chapter 5, using these features can also be used to develop flawed and hybrid heroes and even opposing villains.

An example from my artistic practice: Rodrigo Borgia is brave, courageous, has conviction but is not honest, altruistic, selfless.

The Karpman triangle:[42]
Campbell (2008[1949]) spoke of the "call for adventure" as an essential step to initiate the narrative, often referred to as the inciting incident. This incident or call is the moment when the character has to choose whether to step in/accept the narrative or not. Campbell saw that in many narratives at first the hero refuses this call, only to engage with more fierceness and determination afterwards. "The myths and folk tales of the whole world make clear that the refusal is essentially a refusal to give up what one takes to be one's own interest. The future is regarded not in terms of an unremitting series of deaths and births, but as though one's present system of ideals, virtues, goals, and advantages were to be fixed and made secure." (p. 59-60). The fact that even the hero is reluctant not only communicates to audiences the difficulties of the task ahead but moreover presents the vulnerability of the hero (the drop height, anxieties, the value of what the hero leaves behind).

Once the hero steps in the narrative and takes on the challenge he or she can do that with three different mind-sets. This choice is influenced by the personality of the hero and because of that it will influence the behaviour during the narrative. Karpman was highly interested in the performing arts however the drama triangle has been mostly used within psychotherapy (Karpman was an active member of the *Screen Actor's Guild* and used drama as inspiration for his triangle).
Karpman uses three roles when discussing conflict: the persecutor, the rescuer and the victim. This triangle can be used when creating an inciting incident or call but has profound consequences in the course of the narrative.



source: Karpman (1968).

I have modified the triangle in order to create personality and behavioural patterns of heroes. All three roles them have unique consequences and will steer the narrative, the heroic actions and thus the rapport with audiences. Each role is a dynamic one and will change according to the opponents.

[42] See also: https://www.karpmandramatriangle.com/pdf/thenewdramatriangles.pdf

Position of the Victim:
The victim externalises the responsibility for his or her actions and sees earlier misfortune or behaviour from others as a reason to blame or accuse others (this then can lead to self-justification, revenge, etc.). This behaviour is the motor for the rest of the narrative and chances are high that such victim-characters will never truly take responsibility for their deeds. Victims often start out as fatalist characters that complain, are losing hope and blame others. The victim is not in touch with his resources.

The victim sees the world as an enemy that must be answered, the necessity to set things straight can eventually lead to a grim and bitter revengeful or reckless character. The victim can misuse the position of the self-declared underdog as a justification. Victims will thus use earlier events as the base to act, they can be stubborn, ruthless in their revenge or blind for the pain of others.
The opening monologue of Richard III, by Shakespeare clearly uses the position of a victim when speaking of his appearance but furthermore sees this as a motivation and justification for what will unfold.

> But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks
> nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
> I, that am rudely stamped, and want love's majesty
> to strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
> I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
> cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
> deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
> into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
> and that so lamely and unfashionable
> that dogs bark at me as I halt by them--
> why I, in this weak piping time of peace,
> have no delight to pass away the time,
> unless to see my shadow in the sun
> and descant on mine own deformity.
> And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
> to entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determined to prove a villain

Position of the Rescuer:
The rescuer is the character that cannot help but rescue others and/or take action. The rescuer can easily lose his dignity while saving others and in contrast with the victim he or she overstretches responsibility. The rescuer *needs* problems in order to find meaning in life. Supererogatory acts can be seen as rescuing acts, whereby heroes almost instinctively act without restraint. The rescuer is a character that gets its self-esteem through the appreciation from others. The rescuer is not in touch with himself.

The position as rescuer is well-known once in heroism and can be seen in characters like Superman or Achilles where helping and responsibility are driving forces. When they fail to rescue or save others or are not rewarded as they see fit they will plunge in self-pity and depression. Their self-esteem is directly linked to the appreciation of others. They see problems as an opportunity to act and by doing so gain status within the community. The rescuer needs to be heroic in order to be content in life.

Examples:
Achilles mourning over his death friend Patroclus (*Iliad, 18.20,* Homer)

> "a black cloud of grief enwrapped Achilles, and with both his hands he took the dark dust and strewed it over his head and defiled his fair face, and on his fragrant tunic the black ashes fell. And himself in the dust lay outstretched, mighty in his mightiness, and with his own hands he tore and marred his hair."

Superman:

> Earth is a terrific planet!! But it needs all the help it can get!! Including mine!!
>
> I swear...until my dream of a world where dignity, honor and justice become the reality we all share--I'll never stop fighting. Ever.
> (Kelly, 2001)

Position of the Persecutor:
The persecutor is a character that blames the other for his misfortune and because of that wants to change that status quo. The main difference with the victim is that the persecutor wants to control the others by judging them (in this sense persecutors often feel superior). The persecutor is not in touch with the others.
The persecutor will seek justice because he or she feels mistreated and will thus act as the judge in his or her own life. A persecutor can evolve into a rigid character that refuses any nuance and can easily evolve into executing *bad* actions (that inflict collateral damage). As with the victim, feelings of responsibility can be virtually absent. The persecutor sees himself fit to judge the others.

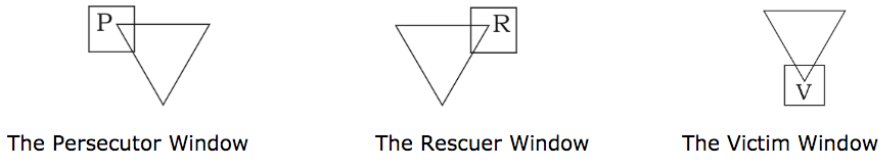
An example:
King Lear (*Act III, scene 2*, Shakespeare)

> Let the great gods,
> that keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads,
> find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,
> that hast within thee undivulged crimes,
> unwhipp'd of justice: hide thee, thou bloody hand;

thou perjured, and thou simular man of virtue
that art incestuous: caitiff, to pieces shake,
that under covert and convenient seeming
hast practised on man's life: close pent-up guilts,
rive your concealing continents, and cry
These dreadful summoners grace. I am a man
more sinn'd against than sinning.

All of the different levels hold dramatic tensions, each of the three positions can lead to ambiguous characters which audiences can connect with, just because all three positions are mind-sets that audiences themselves use or encounter on daily bases. Audiences have felt or recognised, to some degree, the thoughts and emotions connected to being a victim, a rescuer or a persecutor and are therefore able to develop empathy or counter-empathy.
Karpmann's triangle can be used to develop characters, situations that raise the stakes and to develop an emotional rapport with audiences. Even though every character has its habitual role, the positions can change during the narrative as a victim can evolve into the persecutor, or the rescuer can evolve into the victim.

Below is a sheme illustrating how one can get locked into a corner and thus perceive things with a specific "window to the world":



Source: (http://www.karpmandramatriangle.com/pdf/thenewdramatriangles.pdf, p. 3)

In between: Even the absence of the other renders possibilities to create narratives; the rescuer who has no one to rescue (e.g. the depressed and secluded Batman), the victim who is self-destructing through his revenge (e.g. Salieri in *Amadeus* by Shaffer), or the persecutor who has no one to persecute (Prospero in *The Tempest*, by Shakespeare)

Core quadrant and blind spots
Daniel Ofman created the *core quadrant* in 1992 as a tool to reveal and solve frictions on the work floor. Within narratives such frictions between characters are exactly what we are after, in this sense we do the opposite of what Ofman searches for, we try to maximise the conflicts and opposition.

One's core quality can boomerang or an asset can gradually lead to failure or alienate oneself. What makes one heroic can lead to irritation, alienation and ultimately to a failing hero.

In order to develop (hybrid) heroes with personality and behaviour that attracts audiences or at least inflicts discussion, creators can search for their heroes' blind spots. Blind spots weaken the hero, obstruct his actions and result in fierce opposition and obstacles (e.g. dramatic tension/maximum capacity/drop height).

When focussing on the blind spots of heroes, creators will most likely come up with less *clean* heroes, as the blind spot is not only a dramatic Achilles heel but also a tool to tighten the connection, to humanise heroes and to create vibrant (hybrid) heroes which are more easily to empathise with.

Blind spots are those character features that hinder the hero when under pressure. The blind spot of heroes can clearly be seen when heroes start to derail and place action before morality. In this sense, their main asset is their flaw, as heroes have the tendency to lose themselves in a Machiavellian tunnel when pursuing their goal.[63]

Blind spots lead to a fascinating tension between *good* morality and *bad* actions (as can be seen with the *Dirty Harry* franchise) or *bad* morality leading to *good* actions in the hero's opinion (as can be seen with the TV-series *Dexter*).
Next to that, the core quadrant reveals the allergy of characters and their asset; drawing core quadrants almost immediately renders dramatic tension.

[63] See also: Revisiting the Stanford Prison Experiment: Could Participant Self-Selection Have Led to the Cruelty? - Thomas Carnahan, Sam McFarland – *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, May 2007 vol. 33 no. 5 603-614 (p. 610)*

(The core quadrant by Ofmann. [64])

The core quadrant can:
- Reveal possible dangers when a character overstretches his qualities to its maximum: e.g. being precautious can be smart to survive but being too precautious can lead to isolation or distrust, being self-assured can easily evolve into arrogance.
- Be used on the plotting-level to create an ensemble where the different types of behaviour can oppose or collaborate and an organic antagonist can be created who exploits the blind spot of the hero.
- Deduce and try-out certain opposing characteristics and patterns of behaviour. Opposition and thresholds/obstacles fall into place when the blind spot of heroes emerges (e.g. optimistic versus critical, self-assured versus humble, etc.).
- Enhance the empathic rapport, as all mentioned characteristics are to a greater or lesser extent present in every human, therefore we can connect empathically with those characters since "nothing that is human [is] alien to me" (Terentius [65]).

An example:
From the hero's point of view: if the core quality of the hero is *leadership* but he or she takes this to an extreme level (when under pressure), chances are that the hero evolves into a *dictator* and loses support from his peers. The challenge for the hero then is to lead without being dictatorial but if the hero

[64] Van Vliet, V. (2012). *Core quadrant by Daniel Ofman*. Retrieved ToolsHero: http://www.toolshero.com/communication-management/core-quadrant-ofman
[65] Terentius, *The Self-Tormentor,* Act I, scene 1, line 25 (77)

goes too far in this he or she will lose his core qualities as leader, as the hero no longer leads.

From the other characters' point of view: others can feel underestimated if the hero takes the lead without consulting them; they can even choose to stop following the hero or start opposing him (even evolve into the antagonist or contagonist).

Below some (heroic) qualities and their possible pitfalls/allergies and challenges:

Core quality	**Pitfall**	**Challenge**	**Allergy**
Optimistic	Naive	Alert	Pessimism
Efficient	Static	Creative	Chaotic
Empathic	Sentimental	Contemplative	Alienating
Self-assured	Arrogant	Humble	Mediocre
Confident	Fanatic	Relativistic	Meaningless
Courageous	Reckless	Thoughtful	Hesitant

Within the Borgia trilogy Rodrigo fell in the pitfall of underestimating his son, Lucrezia became blind instead of having confidence, Vanozza evolved from cautious to rigid and Cesare evolved into a killer instead of a caring family man

2.2. Circumstances (obstacles)/actions

> "The names of princes and heroes can lend pomp and majesty to a play,
> But they contribute nothing to our emotion.
> The misfortunes of those whose circumstances most resemble our own,
> Must naturally penetrate most deeply into our hearts,
> And if we pity kings we pity them as human beings, not as kings."
> (*The Hamburg Dramaturgy*, Lessing)

Context and actions shape each other reciprocally. Without circumstances, heroic actions will remain absent and without such actions the context cannot change. They are building blocks to develop empathy. Creating a challenging arena is essential to activate heroism, without severe conditions heroism will most likely not ignite.
Bass (1991) described this process of personality and circumstances as "interactionism". Zimbardo (2007), from his part, claims that good people

can do evil things because of the circumstances or the context; therefore, he praises heroes as they, in his opinion, dare to challenge the given situation: "some situations can inflame the 'hostile imagination,' propelling good people to do bad deeds, *while something in that same setting* can inspire the 'heroic imagination' propelling ordinary people toward actions that their culture at a given time determines is 'heroic.'".

Circumstances thus challenge the hero both on the actional level but also on his characteristics, both are able to show heroism and the vulnerability that goes along with it. We could say that the circumstances (fate, opposition, etc.) are what makes a hero heroic; the hero can only come into *action* if there is a circumstance to oppose to. The specific characteristics and features of a hero present a hero in all glory or just the opposite. Circumstances in fiction are there to hinder the hero so that he can shine in the end, as he outwins those opposing circumstances; the battle and/or sacrifice to change or fight circumstances is an important step in heroism.

All these following models focus at the rapport between investment and the final reward. If there is imbalance then either we have a failing hero (which can be tragic or comic) who does not achieve the goal, or an overreaching hero who outnumbers the others (either the opposition is too weak or the hero overstretches his actions). These models can be used to either create or analyse fictional heroes in narratives.

McFarland & Carnahan, 2009 developed an experiment to find out whether and how personality influenced actions; they asked whether a personality could *create* or choose a context in which he or she can act. With a deceptively simple advertisement in six different university newspapers they searched volunteers for an experiment:

> Male college students needed for a psychological study of prison life. $70 per day for 1-2 weeks beginning may 17th. For further information and applications, e-mail: [e-mail address].

In addition, and simultaneously, a second ad was placed. It was an exact copy of the first one but "omitted the phrase 'of prison life' ". Those who volunteered for the "study of prison life" showed significant higher levels of "aggressiveness, authoritarianism, Machiavellianism, narcissism, and social dominance … they were significantly lower in dispositional empathy and altruism." This self-selection confirmed that: "self-selection for situations and activities pervades our lives. We all make intuitive judgments before joining groups or engaging in activities of whether these are likely to fit our personalities and values."

Where Zimbardo sees possible corruption, *the Lucifer effect*, in situational forces, McFarland & Carnahan (2007) see the corruption in the personality of characters as they have a "readiness to be seduced into their heartless behaviors". Although both researchers focus on the real world, we can use their findings to create heroic narratives whereby personality, situations and actions are an inseparable trio.
Whether the personality prevails over the situation is, in my opinion and seen from a creator's point of view, a chicken and egg discussion as both steer each other reciprocally.

In this light, I propose a measurement tool to either raise the heroic stakes or to develop obstacles. In my opinion heroism has to do with the equilibrium between *Investment* and *Reward*. If there is no balance we will either have a tragic hero or a hero who was not really challenged. The same goes for the equilibrium between *Effort* and *Result*, or *Risk* and *Vulnerability*.

The heroic level? – Resistance versus Effort

Actions steer the heroic narrative and the constant rise of dramatic tension is considered as a tool to hold attention within audiences. But I have often found it hard to keep that dramatic tension.

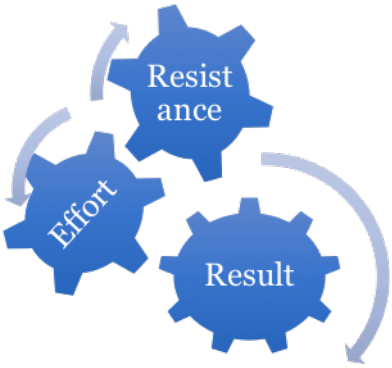
Sucking audiences into narratives is, in my opinion, much easier than holding them emotionally connected in the narrative.

This reward versus investment concept made me work further as I try to come up with a model whereby one can check whether the action and the resistance (obstacles) are keeping track of each other, in other words: do they maintain, what I have labelled as, the *heroic level*.

The heroic level is defined by the constant play between too much, appropriate and too little. If the actions are too clean or too mean the heroic level will diminish. The heroic level will fade away when heroes act too cleanly, too meanly, too much, too little, or act unacceptably (their actions are unbelievable or immoral) or their actions are inconsistent.

Actions (effort) and obstacles (resistance) balance in a constant and fragile interplay. If the actions outnumber the obstacles or inflict unnecessary collateral damage then either humour arises or the credibility diminishes.
(A humorous example of imbalance between obstacle and effort can be seen in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, by Spielberg (1981): Indiana Jones sees himself confronted with an Arab swordsman, who shows off his sword fighting skills, Jones casually pulls out his gun and shoots the obstacle.)
In narratives based on the classic plot point structure, the resistance will rise (and perhaps defeat the hero) at every plot point. Another well-known moment of rising obstacles can be found in the last act, whereby the hero must confront the antagonist in the final battle (in many cases the hero will confront the antagonist alone and without many resources.
The resistance can be: too small, too big, equal to the effort and too clean, too mean.

The effort can be too small, too big, equal to the resistance and too clean, too mean. The results are: a loss, a win, a draw and morally acceptable or unacceptable.



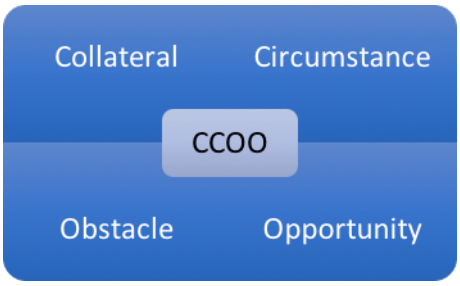
The sum of all the individual scenes leads up to the heroic level and thus to the dramatic tension throughout the narrative. The search for this balance is a tool to attract audiences and leads to a greater emotional and empathic engagement.
The final result or sum of all the individual scenes will define the ultimate status of the hero (e.g. tragic, victorious, flawed hero).

By measuring the heroic level for each individual character, one can see the intertwining oppositions in each scene and determine if every character works at his or her maximum capacity.
Next to that comes dramatic irony, whereby the audience *knows* more than the hero. This can lead to greater involvement. The heroic level can diminish (thus the resistance grows) without the hero being aware off it.
(for a concrete example see the end of this chapter)

CCOO-model

Finally, a last proposal based on resistance and effort is what I have labelled as the CCOO-model (Collateral, Circumstance, Obstacles, Opportunities). If these four elements keep each other balanced then the stakes will gradually rise. E.g. if the collateral damage is in balance with the circumstance the

casualties will most likely be accepted by audiences, or if the obstacles the hero faces render results and thus were an opportunity the hero grabbed, audiences will most likely admire and/or enjoy the heroic journey.



An example:
In the performance, *Each One Alone* the opportunity (seizing power) and the obstacle (Louis XVI) are in balance, while the collateral damage, that Robespierre inflicts is not in balance with the circumstances.

The sum of the action
Statements as "one is the sum of his actions", or, "one's actions define who one is" are perfectly applicable to heroes. Heroes not only proclaim ideas but furthermore undertake actions and by doing so bring personal sacrifices. Taking actions is essential in becoming heroic but proves to be the litmus test at the same time. Therefore, heroes can be both transactional and transformational (Bass, 1990): they act and in that process, are able to change ideologies. Being a transactional or transformational hero depends on, among other elements, the genre and the commercial motivations of the creators.

Most franchised heroes will work as transactional heroes, while hybrid heroes mainly work as transformational heroes but not for commonly accepted moralities or ideologies (in this sense the hybrid hero combines the transformation and action in order to achieve the personal goal).

Actions can lead to empathic rapport. They can be denounced or embraced on different levels:
- Either the actions are considered too *clean* (too soft) or too *mean* (too hard).
- the actions are considered as (in)appropriate: either too much action (exaggerating, not in line with the posed threat, collateral damage), or too little action (not answering the threat, actions that come too late).
- The actions are considered as (un)acceptable: on narrative level (audience cannot engage themselves in willing suspension of disbelief), on personal level (audience cannot connect because of their expectations or background).

- The actions are not (or no longer) defending a commonly accepted morality whereby the hero as subject stands in front of the cause, or the actions – due to their nature - conflict with the moral.

On more structural level:
- The hero is inconsistent in his beliefs or statements.
- The hero changes the objective during his or her journey.

Framing and Scaling

Framing is inherent in narrating; the narrator chooses a point of view on an event and will, because of that, choose to highlight or hide certain elements. The creator uses and chooses certain elements to evoke empathy but every story has different sides. This is one of the elements which served as a base for the creation *Each One Alone*, whereby different tunnels conflicted with each other. (Examples: depending on the point of view a character will either forgive or take revenge, will either let go or hold on.)

Scaling is another tool to develop heroic actions as they do not necessarily have to have *superman*-dimensions, whereby the whole world is at stake. On the contrary, fictional heroics can act strictly on personal bases or their actions can only be known to a small community and still have profound impact on audiences (and characters); as in *the tragedy of Hamlet* (Shakespeare, 1599-1602) or in *La Meglio Gioventù* (Giordano, 2003).

Not the scale or type of the actions but the effort and the circumstantial opposition of the context proves to be decisive in heroism. Zooming in on a character or situation is a usable tool to create fictional narratives, as it can unveil the *greatness* in the *smallness*: I use the term Micromégas to pinpoint such scaling.[66]
Scaling emotions or the heroic is something I try to avoid in my work. One of the magic features of narratives lies, in my belief, in the lens through which creators can develop characters and situations. The most futile problem can evolve into gigantic levels in narratives as domestic problems can hold universal allure. It seems that the zoom lens of creators is a tool to attract audiences rather than to alienate them.

Distant and unknown worlds hold appeal to a large part of the audience, the same can be said of narratives with high levels of concreteness and typical *couleur locale*. Domestic and universal shared feelings do not exclude each other, on the contrary. Heroic narratives which are scaled down do not necessarily lead up to flat anecdotal narratives as we see in gripping

[66] *Micromégas* is also a short story by Voltaire (1752) wherein an alien (an outsider) gives comment on the world.

narratives as e.g. *Jane Eyre* (Bronte, 1847), *Michael Kohlhaas* (von Kleist, 1810), *Death in Venice* (Mann, 1912), *The Process* (Kafka, 1914), The *Circle* (Eggers, 2013).
I believe that as long as the anecdote is the vehicle and not the motor of the narrative (which are, in my opinion, the themes, opposite interest, etc.) creators can come up with micro-narratives that can inflict emotional rapport independently of the time or space context.
Within their domestic lives the heroes will have to act enormously, and the micro arena they inhabit will have to challenge them to mega-actions.

Genre and form do play their part in framing as e.g. a war-story will focus more on the emotions during battles, while a romantic story would probably focus more on emotions as loneliness, missing loved ones, etc.

In my work, it is exactly this re-scaling of emotions and emotive responses that plays an essential role: the world of the performance is not one that mirrors the real world where pain or despair is not measured in terms of grandeur but in terms of depth and possible effect to change or transform the arena. Within my work there is no relativism, this leads - I hope - to a profound empathic rapport with the characters that would not exist beyond the performance (even if these characters are not considered as morally good).

3.3. Proposition, four heroic characters

Heroes are considered as unique characters because they act when others decline. I want to add four different types of heroes with a specific set of actions which are, despite their unique status, able to generate empathy: the non-action hero, the martyr hero the death-wish-hero and the drone hero.
(I will use some examples from real life to clarify the different heroic types)

Non-Action Hero
Although heroes are clearly defined through their actions a fascinating type of action is the *non-action*, which despite its inertness can change the fate of narratives and reality.

However paradoxical it may sound, *not* acting in a heroically manner can nonetheless result in achieving the goal. In real life, we find some well-known examples as the *Montgomery bus boycott* (1955) whereby the black community protested against the racial segregation on public transportation of Montgomery, Alabama. The protest took a yearlong and brought economic distress to the city. It all began with the simple request: “Don't

ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday."[67], this led to an important step in changing racial segregation. Another real life example of non-action can be found in the *Velvet revolution* (the peaceful non-violent protest led to the collapse of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia in 1989, more recently we find an example in the 2014 *Umbrella revolution* in Hong Kong (a massive sit-in protesting against the Chinese electoral system). Perhaps the best-known example, next to Martin Luther King, is Gandhi.
In these specific cases, the active inertness of the hero and the followers which is the heroic action. In this case, the faceless mass can form an impressive heroic conglomerate. (See also: Canetti, 2000 [1962]).

Non-actions can also be seen in plays as: *Hamlet* (as Hamlet invites a theatre group to act as mirror, rather than to take action himself), in *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Rostand (where Cyrano writes romantic poetry for his friend, while being in love with the same girl, Cyrano's actions are unknown and thus considered as non-existing), *le Cocu Magnifique* by Crommelynck (where the confidant Estrugo due to his silence intensifies the mistrust and paranoia of the protagonist Bruno), or *Ivona, princess of Burgundia* by Gombrowicz (where the plot works around the inert Ivona and ignites furious emotions from the other characters leading to the murder of Ivona).
Perhaps the best-known playwright using non-action is Beckett, who used inertness to reflect on his society and commented the desperate and futile status of human beings; e.g. *Waiting for Godot* (1953) where the characters are waiting for something to happen and the inertness is both the situation and the problem.

The non-actional hero holds as much tension as his actional fellows, however in fiction he remains a niche-hero who is only scarcely the protagonist because inertness seems to oppose to the actional nature of heroes. Seemingly doing nothing is an inverse of what most would consider to be heroic.

The Martyr
On the other side of the spectrum we find the all-in heroes or martyrs. The actions of heroes can be dubious and form the base for discussing whether one should be defined as a hero or not. Gerald Seymour (1975, P.62) famously wrote, "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" and pinpointed the essence of the heroes' problematic and ever-changing status. Depending on the standpoint and the individual actions one will be

[67] Source:
http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/leaflet_dont_ride_the_bus_come_to_a_mass_meeting_on_5_december/

considered heroic or villainous (it is this black and white world the hybrid hero challenges by being both).

The martyr is a fascinating figure as dying for the cause may be noble from one point of view but may seem barbaric from the opposite view. Religious examples are e.g. Saint Catherine of the wheel, Alexander of Jerusalem, kamikaze-pilots or radicalised suicide terrorists. The alleged last words of the American martyr Nathan Hale were: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country" (in Donelly, 1985). Martyrs combine cruelty with (religious) transcendence; this potent mix still holds attraction (both in real life and narratives).

In 15th and 16th century martyrs were a popular character within morality, mystery, passion and miracle plays. Such plays were commissioned by the catholic regime to present exemplary and admirable heroes to audiences. The church hoped to secure devotion and admiration through such spectacular plays.

The legacy of martyrs has, in many cases, been re-constructed to instruct communities and has become a tool in political or religious doctrines. The figure of Horst Wessel as martyr is a good example of such political recuperation: Wessel died in 1930 (Berlin) after communists, allegedly, attacked him and a grand funeral was set up to unite the party members rather than to commemorate Wessel as a person. The song he composed soon became the hymn of the NSDAP. Characters as Che Guevara, Joan of Arc, Jesus Christ are all martyrs who have been recuperated in later times.

The heroic martyr is an ambiguous figure as he or she represents an ideology that can either be supported or attacked. Martyrs are mostly used to unite a community, they defend an ideology and are therefore tricky and ambiguous when used in narratives.

Fig. 25: The Borgia Trilogy - Part III, Homo Solo
© Bram Vandeveire – NUNC

Death-wish-hero

The death wish is a label I reserve for those heroes who share the element of dying for a cause with martyrs but in this case, the cause is the *self*. They can be found in the

Romantic literature but as easily in the Iliad.

Examples are Ajax (Sophocles, 440 BC), Michael Kohlhaas (von Kleist, 1810) or Maria Stuart (Schiller, 1800).

These characters see their death as less important than achieving the goal: death is a small price to save their honour or too overcome the antagonist.

Ajax, sees death as the only way to honour the gods and save his legacy (the Japanese hara-kiri can be linked to Ajax), Kohlhaas, in his wish for revenge loses everything he holds dear - family, ground, financial means - and eventually gets beheaded. Maria Stuart, from her part, sees death as the ultimate victory as she believes she will cast an everlasting shadow on her archenemy queen Elizabeth I

Death becomes a tool to either prove the perseverance or prevail over the opponents (forever). Contrary to martyrs, the death-wish-heroes die for their own causes, rather than for a moral paradigm, religion or country. And yet, claiming that such heroes are the egoistic would not be correct either. Their ideology and their self coincide, they are the morality.

We explored *death* as ultimate weapon of victory in two performances: the Borgia trilogy and *Two Queens* (based on the life of Maria Stuart).

In the Borgia trilogy, we choose death as the ultimate disdain or humiliation of the other. As Rodrigo Borgia says his goodbyes, he assumes that his archenemy della Rovere will feel lost without his opposition. In a provocative and death defying way, Rodrigo chose to leave the stage and paradoxically came out as the victor or their life long battle. As it is unclear whether Rodrigo is sincere or not, he holds his best cards for last. Through the bitter sweetness we tried to be ambiguous till the very end. As all characters left the stage, one by one, a lonely della Rovere remained on a stage where he no longer belonged as it was taken over by the music band.

In *Two Queens*, which we presented in the courthouse of Gent (B), Maria Stuart clearly believes that she is entitled to the throne. (see, Fig 26) During the battle with Queen Elizabeth, Maria Stuart starts considering death not only as a chance to prove her resilience compared to queen Elizabeth but she, furthermore, assumes that through her death her legend will rise; that she, paradoxically, will be more alive through death. Both queens know the power of symbols but since Queen Elizabeth lacks the courage or is more pragmatic she stands defenceless in front of her passionate archenemy. The furious enmity between Maria Stuart and Queen Elizabeth made them rise above themselves. As they needed to keep each other's pace they both grew.

They consider the existence of the other as the one thing to overcome, thus the defeat of the other is the only solution for all problems. This phenomenon has been called the mirror image by Bronfenbrenner (1961), who used it in the context of the cold war and arms race between the USA and USSR. It can serve as a tool to create a climax, a tension that feels organic and ends in a devastating end-battle (in most cases the final battle will be between the hero and the villain without any other characters involved).
Death becomes a weapon rather than a loss as Maria Stuart proves her loyalty and her courage to sacrifice herself; she defies and mocks life through her death wish. Death is no longer an element to remain honourable or escape reality, as is the case with *Ajax* by Sophocles but becomes a mean to an end.

In retrospect, we could apply the central features by Kinsella et al. And conclude that both Rodrigo Borgia and Maria Stuart score well on labels as self-sacrifice, determination, courage and conviction but score weak on altruism, moral integrity, selflessness and honesty. Both protagonists hold ambiguities and are hard to categorise as a hero or a villain. They are heroic through their actions, un-heroic through their personality and their moral paradigms are - to say the least- questionable.

Fig. 26: Twee Kweenen (Two Queens), Rehearsal 2010 © Benjamin Van Tourhout

Fragment Two Queens (Van Tourhout, 2010)

Maria:

Wishful thinking, you can turn which way you want.
I will always stand in front of you.
I will walk next to you and with you. Always.
If you look in the mirro, guess who you will see?
You killed me, but you're dead yoourself
You cracked me, but I grew
You spit at me, but I grew
I win because you loose
You freed me of life

The Drone character, an ambiguous sidekick

I would like to propose the Drone character as the figure that stands between the martyr and the death wish-hero as sidekick.
A drone character is the figure that stands in the shadows as he or she is the assistant of another character. An exemplar of the drone character can be found in the assassin Michelotto who executed the murders Cesare Borgia commissioned (Jordan, 2011-2013).
The drone character can be de-humanised as it can be seen as a remote-controlled character (he or she executes what is commanded). But the drone is chosen because of his excellent skills and loyalty.
In this sense, the drone becomes an extension of the hero/villain, he represents the power and the determination. The danger, and fascination, for drone characters lies in the combination of both their skills and their possible *awakening*: the moment the drone acknowledges his or her qualities and no longer feels attached to the instructor he can choose to switch sides or evolve into a shapeshifter. The moment the drone starts questioning his instructor's demands or morality the risk of defection takes place.
In this sense, the hero-drone relation is one that holds dangers, the hero can never be completely sure of the loyalty of his well-trained sidekick.

The drone can evolve into a revolutionary leader (as in e.g. the heroic Spartacus), a whistle-blower (as e.g. Edward Snowden), or in the formation of a group of well-trained paratroopers, or diplomats. The moment the drone sees his personal qualities he or she becomes a liability. If on the other hand, the drone does not acknowledge his uniqueness he or she will remain a functional instrument in the narrative (the one who gets his hands dirty). Both the drone and his commissioner are in desperate need for each other, which points at the delicate balance of their collaboration.
The drone needs instructions to find his self-respect; the leader needs the drone to remain clean but feared.

In the television series the *Borgias* (Jordan, 2011-2013) the loyalty of Michelotto is secured due to his passionate love for Cesare Borgia (as long as he remains in love with his instructor he will remain loyal) but the moment the drone-character develops moral reflections the risk of shapeshifting is at hand. This leaves us with a dramatic tension between leader and follower, whereby the follower has the chance to develop from sidekick to hero or villain.

2.3. Background & context

In order to generate empathy - or at least acceptance - of heroic behaviour, creators can create a context and background, which allows the hero to work from an emotional base and towards a certain goal (in this sense background functions as humus for emotional connections).
Trauma, solitude, exclusion are much used tools to create a background audiences can connect with. This background will, in many cases, trigger the inciting incident. Next to that, background provides an emotional framework for the hero to reflect on current matters. The background can easily lead to a tunnel-vision of heroes where the behaviour and the actions are considered acceptable and necessary in order to achieve the goal.
The background proves to be an empathic element that often shows the initial underdog-position. A bruised and low-status character has the ability to attract empathy just because being the underdog is a position most members of the audience will already have experienced themselves. This leads to a shared and mutual emotional background and thus layer to work from. As we saw with the hybrid hero, such backgrounds can lead audience across the border of their own moral or empathic framework.
A second tool to evoke empathy is the context in which the hero lives and must act. If the context is created in such a way that the actions are seen as appropriate and the *best* thing to do, empathy can occur even when the actions or morality of the hero are questionable. Within a supposed harmless fictional context, audiences can connect or accept moral paradigms or actions, they would not as easily accept in real life. This is what we define as *wrong empathy*.
If the contextual circumstances are presented or perceived by the hero as being unfair, or harsh, he or she will react accordingly and audiences can adopt the viewpoint of the hero. The background and context can work empathically within audiences because of the similarity or probability.
Background and context are tools creators can use to develop empathy with heroes even if they operate from a tunnel vision. This means that not only heroism lies in the eye of the beholder but also that the sum of the heroic actions is based on personal attribution, both from the hero's point of view and that of audiences. If the context and background is not questioned by

audiences but fully accepted, audiences will root for the hero, despite its moral values (see, Part I).
One of the essentials of an empathic rapport between hero and audiences comes down to aligning both their points through e.g. a bruised background. In other words:
a) develop a past and features which makes current and future actions acceptable,
and b) create a context which allow heroes to act to what they believe is necessary.

In between: Heroism is in its essence something that must be defined by others. In fiction however, we see many examples of villainous figures that raise themselves to the heroic status (e.g. Macbeth, Richard III, Tony Stark). They all see themselves as heroic and as the solution to the problem. In the Borgia-trilogy, Rodrigo Borgia (see, fig. 27) uses the heroic label to describe himself when he has to wait for others to speak:

> "Nothing so boring as a forgotten life, a forgotten love.
> Perhaps, we can now proceed to the entrance of the main figure,
> the hero of this story. The one you killed?"

Fig. 27: The Borgia Trilogy - Part III, Homo Solo
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Necessity
Accepting or undertaking an ambivalent action does not necessarily rule out reflection. This reflection within the narrative is a much-overseen tool in creating (ambiguous) empathy.

If the hero reflects on his or her actions and has an acceptable explanation for them based on e.g. necessity, destiny, urgency etc. the hero can lure audiences into accepting actions or paradigms that would otherwise be denounced. In this sense, the hero *plays* with the given context as heroes can whitewash themselves and their actions as being necessary.

Nunning (2015) says on necessity as deceiving narrative trick that "actors ascribe reasons to their own behaviour, in contrast, they tend to discount their own personality traits, while emphasising the pressures in the particular situation and other external causes. Being well aware of the circumstances which influence their choice of action, but less aware of their own attitudes, they think that the vagaries of the particular situation have occasioned the action."
In the Borgia trilogy, we used this self-given permission and self-declared necessity as a tool: Rodrigo Borgia, now and then, spoke of his fears and doubts. He asked whether his actions and goals were noble or justified. But because of the circumstances (e.g. the rebellious character of his son Cesare, the fact that everything was already set in motion) Rodrigo saw no other option than to proceed (as planned). Such scenes were performed with emotional tension which helped in sedating audiences, they mainly saw a grieving man and not so much the monster hidden behind the sorrowful mask.

> You know I have sinned. But could I admit that in front of them?
> If I only had the courage, but …
> You see, I work for my family and they see me as a monster?
> If I didn't have my children, all would be different, but yeah, I have them, so …
> Can I behead Cesare? Would that be a solution?
> Do you see my shoulders? Once they had wings but now they are burned.
> Been too close to hell I assume.
> You must believe me.
> Every day I hope to make things right, but due to the misery I made yesterday I must sin today and …
> I am stuck.
> I am the pope.
> Do people hate me because I love my children?
> I don't want to be me, any longer. I am so sick of it all.
> But can I be another?

(*The Borgia Trilogy, Part II: Homo Fatale.)*

If:
a) the problem is strong enough, the circumstances emotionally draining and audiences are reminded every now and then of the threat or danger,
b) the hero is ready to sacrifice his life and ethics this will result in,
c) a perceived *need* to act and thus into accepting ambiguous behaviour and morality.

Necessity is also linked to framing, the creators chose a certain viewpoint the hero adopts and this leads to a specific framework wherein the hero acts.

Supererogation
But not all people who are labelled as heroic do necessary agree with that attributed status. Characters may claim that they had the urge, felt the need or saw no other option etc. thus, without any form of reflection. This has been described as *supererogation*.
This supererogation can be seen both in real life and fiction. It is often used to describe typical heroic actions as saving someone from a fire, a battle in a war zone etc. Supererogation is connected with a moment in a specific time and space context, e.g. parents can perform heroic actions if their children are in need. In fiction, the supererogatory act can be *mis*-used to create a fictional framework whereby behaviour and actions are at hand to create empathy through admiration for the unique actions.
Acts of supererogation in reality will often result in a fictional narrative as e.g. a film on flight United 93 (*United 93*, 2006, Greengrass), on the pilot who landed his plain in the Hudson River (*Sully*, 2016, Eastwood,) or on Oskar Schindler (*Schindler's List*, 1993, Spielberg). Such narratives have impact, in my opinion, because they remind audiences of the best part of what humans can be or do for each other (it should thus not surprise that big movie companies invest in such narratives).

In real life, supererogation has been used as propaganda or management tool: certain figures were used as symbol, as exemplar for others in the hope that their actions would inspire, be copied and strengthen the connection with and among the group of followers. Whether or not the person was actually as good as claimed, becomes less important overtime. This exemplary hero can be seen in military contexts as e.g. the title of hero of the Soviet Union, the Victoria Cross in the UK or the Medal of Honour in the USA. These awards pay tribute to (extreme) acts of valour but moreover serve as incentive for others to do as good.
Honouring war-heroes in a political or military context is ambiguous as it honours a person who either has killed or has been killed and demands the same from others. Milder versions of the exemplary hero can be found in business where the employee of the month or year is chosen. Here too, it serves two goals: praising the individual and hoping that others will follow and do the same.
Once again, we see that heroism is a tool, something that is considered as an incentive for action, as something to follow or copy.

2.4. Heroic goal

The heroic goal in itself is tool to attract attention and/or empathy. If the goal of the hero is one, which resonates within audiences, empathic reaction will most likely occur. Basic goals include:
-revenge (for a loss of love or status)

-rebelling (against status quo e.g. social inequality)
-protect (a loved one, a community)
-gain status (within a community)

The care for family or community is a much-used tool for both heroes and villains. It seems that, if a goal has altruistic intentions the empathic connection between audience and hero will be stronger. Paradoxically if the villain wants to safeguard his community, empathic reactions will not be rendered as easily. As we saw, the context and perspective of the protagonist can *lure* audiences and deceive audiences. Goals that are limited to personal gain (egoism) will, in most cases, diminish the empathic impact and are therefore attributed to the classic villain. As we saw both the goodness of heroes, and the badness of villains is seen as more extreme in fiction ("We found that fictional heroes and villains were rated as more definitely good or bad than their real-world counterparts" (Goethals & Allison, 2012).

If the hero (or hybrid hero) empathises with someone else, audiences will more likely mirror such empathic emotions and thus develop empathy for the hero. In my opinion, mirroring of empathy is thus an essential step in developing empathy (See also: Chapter 3)
Heroic goals can attract responses on three levels within audiences:
-to be as the hero (identification)
-to feel as the hero (empathy)
-to feel for the hero (sympathy)

To attract empathy the three levels will have to coincide and the focus on one of these levels will partially determine the genre of the narrative.

2.5. Form/genre

The genre renders both expectations and bias because specific genres aim at a specific target audience. Genres can be seen as a door through which audiences enter (or not) and by which creators define or label their narrative. The genre and form are an asset and a curtail.

Expectations
Audiences expect certain elements when engaging themselves in genre-specific narratives or a specific medium. Books or plays that are labelled as a thriller, a western or science fiction must hold certain elements that set the narrative apart. Audiences anticipate certain elements and want to see that want satisfied.

Creators must acknowledge that a specific audience will choose to engage, while others will ignore the narrative, just because of the genre-label or specific medium and its inherent features. The more commercially motivated a narrative is, the more genre-related features will appear to satisfy audiences' wants.

Genre features are only slowly changing as they work on the common ground between audience and creator. (In superhero narratives, especially in movies, the risk of limiting a hero to a set of features is currently at hand, see among others Mann, 2014, on the Post-Ideological hero).

Bias

Because of these genre specific features audiences choose to engage while others decline because of e.g. preconceptions, negative experiences, or a lack of knowledge. Two clear examples are horror (as genre) and opera/musical (as form): both hold thresholds for some while they attract others. Some readers will never choose horror movies or historical plays, while certain theatre audiences rather die than go and see a musical as *Mama Mia* or an opera as *Così fan Tutti.*

If audiences cannot accept the fact that zombies are attacking major cities or that the act of dying takes minutes with musical virtuoso, the potential impact of the narrative will diminish.

Because of the form and genre specific features, only a certain group can or will connect with the narrative as they need to imagine, accept or belief the presented narrative despite its formalistic characteristics. But for those who can accept both genre and formalistic aspects it brings profound pleasure due to e.g. intertextuality, (musical) complexity.

The concept of *probability*, thus, not only plays a role within the narrative but also on the outside façade, the genre and the form must allow a certain degree of suspension of disbelief (Coleridge, 1868). Audiences must be able to accept that the narrative could - in one way or another - happen and unfold as it does.

This probability is considered as a tool because the more probable a situation is, the more people it can affect. The characters answer the call after an inciting incident, e.g. the kidnapping of a child, the killing of a loved one. The concreteness of the situation is therefore a tool to broaden the impact of specific genres or forms.

Similar and Probable

Earlier I wrote that similarity between the fictional character and the audience is a tool to strengthen identification, as it makes audiences susceptible because they re-live situations when fictional characters encounter similar (life-changing) events as mourning, falling in love, etc.

The similarity works on a shared background, thus working with elements from the past.
Probability, on the other hand, works on imagination of audiences, as they can imagine that such and such event portrayed in the narrative, could also happen to them in reality.

If similarity and probability work together, chances are audiences will connect empathically, e.g. *King Lear*. We could also say that the more domestic situations are met with grand drop height and risk, the more audience groups will be connected. (See also: Framing and Scaling).

Due to the similar domestic context (the battle between a father and his children) and the probable level of frustration (e.g. when Lear rages in the woods) such plays can become timeless because, even if we ourselves have not experienced a similar disillusion, it is not so hard to imagine how betrayal feels - we can even assume it will happen to us one day. Therefore, probable situations combined with concrete emotional similarities, forms a tool that can attract empathy.

The otherness of form and genre as fantasy or horror works, paradoxically, with non-probable elements: the chance that audiences will ever see the *Shire in Middle-Earth* are non-existent and yet, due to the impossibility a large audience is attracted and is willing to engage. Audiences cannot otherwise than imagine this unknown fantasy world, it seems that this process of imagining forms an essential part of the enjoyment.

Next to that, the morality in most fantasy narratives works on reward-punishment moralities. In most cases there is a clear cut between good and bad and in the end the heroes will prevail over the villains. Such narratives work on creating other worlds, which are often very detailed, and searches concrete situations and actions into an abstract and unknown world. This leads to an empathic connection although the context is non-probable in the strict sense. [68]

Forms as S.F. and fantasy remind us of fables and myths with characters as cyclops, giants, dragons etc.
The same can be said of the numerous superheroes who act as gods and challenge similarity and probability. While nobody, in their right mind, can believe he will one day wake up being Super-or Spiderman, or fly back and forth from Krypton to earth, it is the *dream* these superheroes represent that attracts audiences: they deliver escapist entertainment. But perhaps even more important is the overall moral clarity which can be seen as

[68] An example of the detailed description of *The Shire* in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955)*: http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/The_Shire*

transcendent and exemplary characters. How they handle things is often more important than what they handle, of course the splendour of such narratives contributes to the adrenaline seekers. It should not surprise us that Superman has been seen as a modern-day Jesus Christ (who in his own right was a superhero to as he walked over water, multiplied food, made dead people walk, etc.)

It is fascinating to see that large groups of audiences imitate superheroes in cos-plays, attend huge festivals as e.g. Comicon. The audience *acts*, as performers do, and imitate non-existent characters. This *doublure* by the audience is a unique step in the empathic rapport, they not only sympathise and empathise but become the character (they over-identify with the fictional character).
In addition to that, it seems that male and female audiences tend to prefer other genres and forms as Adringa (2004) found out that "male readers tended to a certain favorite genre, such as, for example, science fiction, or to a favorite author throughout their lives, whereas female readers wrote more about their changing ways of reading. Also, the female readers reported more than twice as many identification experiences."

2.6. Moral Premise

Creators search impact and will choose those narratives, characters and situations that they see fit within a certain context, if and how they respond to audiences' *want* is up to the creator, but one cannot deny the impact a context plays on how and when heroic narratives are created.
Narratives work on a condensed level and use a specific *eye* to describe actions and characters. Besides entertaining audiences, narratives exist to explore a theme or a concept and to affirm or question paradigms.
An element that can be found in almost every writing course is the emphasis on the premise. There are different definitions, but I see a premise as: the element a creator wants to explore during the course of the narrative.

Premises show the paradigms a creator wants to communicate and elaborate on because they are the moral nucleus, the moral compass within this specific narrative. Because of that creators can check whether the premise is present in the different acts, scenes or dialogues. I prefer premises that emphasise the process, character development, the transformation. Therefore, I would describe the premise of Richard III as greed leads to a deep loss. Since a premise is a moral synthesis by the creator, it points out that most creators, knowingly or not, accept the idea that their work intends to have a moral impact.

The chosen viewpoint (or final outcome) reveals both the fascination and the ideologies of the creator, this could explain why so many creators are

convinced of the moral qualities of narratives. This could coincide with Stotland et al. (1978, p88-89, 107) who found that "high fantasizers" attribute more worth to empathy than other. Since artists tend to be higher fantasisers, this could explain why artists themselves believe more than the average person in the empathic, ethical means of art. I believe creators are not better equipped to empathise but perhaps due to a constant focus on emotions and fantasizing a higher perception may occur next to a higher value of elements as empathy and fantasy.

Overtime creators had to more and more skilfully hide their premises, as audiences learned the premise should not be too obvious, too clean or given away too soon. Contemporary audiences want to explore narratives, discover hidden treasures and therefore are no longer happy with what you see is what you get. Or as Abramović said (2012): "Art reflecting society as it is today is not an answer because it is already shitty, so why put more shit into it? You have to find a way to actually elevate the spirit so that it's a kind of oxygen to society. To bring concepts and awareness, to ask the right questions. … an art concept has to have so many layers so that every part of the society can take what it needs." Thus, rather than providing answers, as heroes have done in the past, modern heroism focusses more on questioning audiences – it is clear that this is a shifting pendulum which also depends on the medium (e.g. audiences in the West-European theatre are much more questioned then e.g. the audience of Hollywood block busters).[69]

A premise is, in my opinion, the inner reason to write, that which the creators wants to prove or question, and it reveals personal ideologies condensed as the nucleus of the narrative.

2.7. Text and Narrative

On a profane level the amount of time a character has in the narrative is most likely to influence the rapport with audiences. How logical this may sound, it is a tool which one can use: the character that audiences *must* connect with has most lines. Budelman et al. (2013) found that plays were "director proof" just because of the monologues in the text, they also found that the character who has the lead in the first scenes is the character audiences are most likely to follow (both emotionally and morally).

Next to that the *monologue* is tool strongly connected with the performing arts, this means that the theatre has two empathic advantages (the physical

[69] This has, among other elements, to do with target groups as Hollywood blockbusters focus on an international audience: "The movies are crafted mainly to provoke a visceral – as opposed to intellectual – response. And according to US Film critic Matt Singer: "Movies have to be made as sensitively as possible so as to not offend any particular country." (in Tom Brook, BBC, 2014)

connection and the usage of the first person) and as Booth (1961[1983]) states: "if an author wants intense sympathy for characters who do not have strong virtues to recommend them, *then* the psychic vividness of prolonged inside views will hem him" (p.377-78). Van Peer and Pander (1996) speak of "the illusion of closeness", audiences have more time with character x, therefore they are most likely to connect with that character. For me this, perhaps self-evident knowledge, was the step from unconsciously to consciously playing with attendance of characters in scenes.

It is clear that the quality of the text and structure is an asset to develop admiration and empathy. The wit of a hero is a tool to attract audiences, his eloquent and ad rem manner of speaking gives allure and becomes an asset in admiring and/or the enjoyment of heroes. The poetry and one-liners of heroes, both then and now, can *brand* heroes and their creators are admired for *playing* with language and structure.
Most heroes have a specific idiom (e.g. cynical, ad-rem, witty) and a way of expressing their thoughts and emotions. This idiom can be seen as the *branding* of the hero as it connects audiences both on the level of anticipation and on affirming. A specific idiom enhances the textual quality of heroes is an asset for (hybrid) heroes as the manner of speaking can obscure the underlying ethical wishes and can, at the same time, emphasise the uniqueness of the hero. Language then becomes an alluring mask, as a cover to judge the book by.

In between: Zwaan (1994, p. 921-925) experimented on the engagement of audiences concerning the differences between factual and fictional stories and found that audiences pay more attention to words and style of the language in fictional than in factual stories. That would mean that audiences not only enjoy the emotional rapport but furthermore the quality of language in narratives.

Dramatic position and vulnerability of the hero
The underdog position is a much-used tool within heroic narratives and this because of different reasons:
a) the character can evolve from *zero to hero*,
b) audiences feel empathy (through similarity) for underdogs, and
c) the impact of the hero can grow during the narrative.

The hero's journey by Campbell starts out with a status quo, so that the character can transform itself into a hero. Therefore, the position of the underdog is a narrating tool (rather than a heroic characteristic) to attract empathy and to highlight the effort and sacrifice. The lower the character sets out the higher he or she can rise and generate admiration.
In classic heroic narratives, the hero as underdog will in many cases oppose to the villain who is in charge. The appreciation of audiences will however

be measured at the end: if the hero fails to achieve or did not give his everything, audiences will be disappointed. Audiences will root for the underdog, assuming that he or she will eventually become the leader (the top dog). Intriguingly Allison & Goethals (2011, p. 131) found out that the success of an underdog is partly determined by its "unlikely – but not impossible – chance to prevail", thus the appeal of the underdog draws from the anticipation of audiences: A small but reasonable possibility of success is apparently necessary to assure a (empathic) rapport.
This does not mean that a hero must complete the task to become heroic; it has to do with the effort and the dropping height of the hero. This rooting for the underdog, who will - possibly - turn out to be the hero, is a fascinating process audiences seem to enjoy over and over again.

Dying for the cause still seems to be the best option for attracting the heroic status, both Allison and Goethals (2009) and Simonton (1994) found proof that dying or being assassinated led to much higher approval rate. Simonton even found that in order to gain the heroic label the assassination must be successful. Allison and Goethals defined this as the "death positivity bias" (p. 217), this appreciation for sacrifices explains the success of martyrs (both in fiction and reality).

The fact that heroes can, or at least are prepared to die, brings the attention to the vulnerability of heroes, another tool to attract empathy. A body full of scars is, in many cultures, a status symbol or a "mark of heroic identity" (Neal, 2006). The visible marks of earlier fights, the fact that one was able to endure and recover from such wounds highlights the uniqueness of the war-hero. Mc Coy (2013) states that heroes weigh their legacy over their life: "He must decide whether he wishes to live a long, domestic, uneventful life, or a short but heroic one, and in choosing his short life but heroic death, both his life and his manner of death are tied to glory" and that "his choice is explicitly one that is made in the light of what will be said about him, the meaning his life will take on within a narrative context." (p. 17).
Not only does vulnerability generates empathic reactions, it can also lead to affect and identification: witnessing pain or torture generates arousal within audiences as we shiver while seeing a character in agony (at least if that person is the one whe are rooting for, or have an empathic relation with). The mirror-neurons give immediate and physical affect, within theatre this instant-effect can be played with in a tangible way. E.g. the performance *Liefhebber* by Rijnders (1992) whereby audiences witnessed a frustrated reviewer who abolished the theatre as institute claiming that it is all fake and phoney but while demolishing the set on stage, he does not see how his wife and son encounter *real* pain (Audiences witnessed heroine-shots, rape, strangling, etc.)

This play worked with the transparent symbols of theatre, whereby real and false theatrical actions were combined with a furious accusation of the meaningless theatre that surrounded the reviewer. It received both praise and condemnations, extreme right-wing parties even tried to prohibit the performance (others like Fabre or Castellucci also work on, and with the transparency of performing).

According to McCoy the fear and pity tragedies need, work partially on the vulnerability of heroes: "we are much more likely to see a particular event as fearful under certain conditions: if the outcome is imminent, i.e. sooner, rather than later; when those who can cause the harm are more powerful than we are; when we have already experienced a particular type of harm; and in the case of events that we cannot easily control. However, if these experiences are thought of as more likely to happen to others than to ourselves, then we might experience pity instead of fear so, whether we feel fear or pity if we see a man such as Oedipus move from honour to exile in an unexpected reversal of fortune will depend very much on our own experiences of being vulnerable." (ibid, p. 173-174)

The dramatic position of the hero is unstable during the whole course of the narrative; due to drop height, vulnerability and subsequent need for risk-taking and sacrifice.
As long as the hero is under pressure (in the broadest sense), empathy and engagement of audiences are likely to take place.
It is thus a question of keeping the pressure and constantly raising the stakes, to keep audiences hooked into the heroic narrative.

2.8. Morality of the hero

Philosophers as Nussbaum, Booth and others have praised narratives because of their practical and situational presentation of moral dilemmas. While agreeing that this is indeed a function of narratives, it would be, I believe, a shame to limit heroic narratives to an instructional or pedagogical vehicle.
Graham et al. (2008) sees two modi operandi: the *individualising moralities,* which focus on the extension and protection of individual rights, and *binding moralities*, which focus on the promotion and protection of social groups and institutions. The context (or status quo) in which heroes emerge thus will determine which morality the hero uses (in order to attract attention from audiences). Most authors, however, will try and combine these two moral sets, the narrative often starts with an individual moral need which can evolve into a broader moral scheme. Authors try to develop domestic problems into universal narratives (where the anecdote is the binding element to explore themes as e.g. love versus hate, loyalty versus betrayal,

etc.). Ridout (2009, p.15) summarises this process as: “In the theatre, ethical problems tend to get presented as social problems, a fact which gives their treatment additional historic specificity.”
This partially explains why Nussbaum and others are so fond of fiction as moral or philosophical tool, the moral problems have a concrete reason and consequence.

Dilemma

A much-used tool to inject ethics into narratives is the dilemma; the protagonist needs to choose the impossible because both options are similarly good or bad therefore logic and reasoning have no effect whatsoever.
Characters like Dirty Harry, Vic Mackey or Jack Bauer made the dilemma the central element of their narrative, as every encounter with other characters and every subsequent decision is linked to the dilemma of doing wrong to achieve the good. Such characters live in the “the dark zone of the instrumental reason, suspending moral rules in the face of circumstance” according to Bokiniec (2010).
It seems that hybrid heroes not so much work on moral dilemmas as they have already decided and are ready to live with the consequences.

The dilemma is the perfect vehicle for creators to schematise the pro and contra of a certain behaviour or action, it is not only a turning point within the narrative but can also be used as a meta-tool that challenges moral concepts of audiences and invites them to reflect on the dilemma themselves. Dilemmas invite audiences to take part, to empathise, as they ask audiences: What would you do? What do you think? What is, according to you, the best option?
Because of that audiences would indeed feel that dilemmas are impossible choices.
Because of that dilemmas are a highway to the hearts and minds of audiences.

Dirty Harry allure

Dirty Harry (1971) is another example of a flawed hero who switches moral sides; he wants to clear the streets from bad guys, no matter the cost. The creators, already in the advertisement, played with the challenging moralities as the movies were announced with taglines as: “He doesn’t break murder cases. He smashes them.” Or “You don't assign him to murder cases. You just turn him loose. “
Dirty Harry is just one of many examples of cops turning bad. Creators play with expected and effective behaviour. One expects impeccable behaviour from policemen, judges, etc. but in narratives their effective behaviour often resembles that of villains.

The perceived agency of officers, politicians in contrast with their humanlike vices is a tool to inflict unrest, to render emotional connection or affect (enjoyment, being awe-struck, anger, etc.) within audiences.

Klockars (1980, p.33) gives a workable definition of dilemmas in the context of Dirty Harry: "a genuine moral dilemma is a situation from which one cannot emerge innocent no matter what one does - employ a dirty means, employ an insufficiently dirty means, or walk away. … the danger lies not in becoming guilty or wrong - that is inevitable - but in thinking that one has found a way to escape a dilemma which is inescapable." Thus, the fact that flawed heroes believe they found a way is one of the things which makes them flawed.

Moral thought versus moral behaviour

Tools to make collateral damage acceptable for audiences can be found in background (emotional) context and the perceived necessity but also on a more profane level, e.g. in just a few minutes of torture Bauer extracts the information he needs. This short moment of moral disintegration renders positive results which condones the collateral damage. Next to that, the heroic position itself helps facilitating immoral actions, the hero declares himself as the only one ready or qualified to do what must be done. There is thus an interplay between the hero who places himself in a messianic position and his or her context that confirms, even pushes, this status to its critical maximum.

Earlier, the process of supererogatory was discussed - where the hero feels obliged to act because of the situation and thus not necessarily for moral reasons. Although, in the end, the result may be the same the inciting incident differs. Colby and Damon (1992, p. 300) have done interesting research concerning heroes and their virtues. They conducted in-depth case studies of 23 moral exemplars and tried to see which virtues these figures embodied. The most relevant finding, for our purposes, is that these *moral* heroes did not seem to consider their actions as heroic precisely because they identified so closely with the moral values. "The exemplars have done so without devaluing their own personal goals. Nor do they disregard their own fulfilment or self-development, nor, broadly construed, their own self-interests. They do not seek martyrdom. Rather than denying the self, they define it with a moral centre." It brought Archer and Ridge (2015) to conclude that "moral heroes would not have been making a sacrifice in the seemingly relevant sense of making themselves worse off in acting as they did. In fact, they would have been making a sacrifice if they had acted otherwise!"

This brings me to conclude that moral exemplars do not *choose* to act in a moral way, but that morality is a consequence of their identity, which in a way makes the decision for them.

But what if the morality of heroes harms his or her community? What if the choices are heroic but not smart or constructive? Morality then may prove to be bad judgement or, even worse, prelude the end of the hero or his community. Morality then does not serve as an ethical and exemplary horizon but as a problematic circumstance.
Such heroes can be perceived as moral exemplars but gain nothing from their morality, they and everyone with them are the victims of their beliefs. Which brings us to the blind spot (Ofman, 1992) or as Archer and Ridge state "moral heroes do exhibit very real and exceptional moral depth in their identification with the relevant moral values, they also typically get so carried away by their enthusiasm for those values that they fail to recognise their own very real sacrifices", and I would add they forget the sacrifices of their community because they are blinded by the goal and no longer care for collateral damage.
Thus, acting based on moral principles does not guarantee *good* actions nor success.
The above brings us organically to the discussion whether heroes act to develop/maintain their own status or that they act for the benefit of others. One could argue that whatever one does for oneself will benefit others which Adam Smith (1759) labelled as the *invisible hand* and describes as: "the rich ... are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, … and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society." From a more evolutionary standpoint Krebs (2009) wrote that "cooperative and altruistic behaviors and moral virtues have evolved in humans" because "moral virtues are attractive to potential mates". The discussion whether heroes are egoistic and/or altruistic is important during the creation process, as one has to decide how and why heroes come into action.

To inspire such discussions Sorensen (2004) gave us four fascinating paradoxes on moral worth. I mention them here not with the purpose of solving the paradoxes but in the hope, they can inspire when creating characters:
- Strength: it can be bad to want a good thing *too much*: desiring to be good gets in the way of being good when the desire is particularly strong. (p. 468)
- Singularity: I can be bad to want a good thing when this is the only thing one wants, for there are other good things, too. (p. 469)
- Ambition: it can be bad to want *too much* of a good thing: desiring to be *too* good gets in the way of being good. (p. 469)

- Manner: it can be good to go for something good in the wrong *way*. Trying to be good through the wrong means, or in the wrong manner, can get in the way of being good. (p. 470)

These paradoxes can become tools in heroic narratives either to strengthen the heroic quality or to blur it and develop MAC's.
Hybrid heroes act for their personal *good* and acknowledge that during the journey there will be moments were the *good* is questioned by others which will, in many cases, make them even more determinant to achieve *their good*. Hybrid heroes are ready to live with collateral damage, bad reputation and dirt on their hands. Hybrid heroes herald a saying which was long kept strictly for franchised hero Spider-Man: "in this world, with great power there must also come – great responsibility." (Lee and Ditko, 1962) [70]

2.9. Physical connections

In the context of performing arts the appearance and subsequent emotions from the audience cannot remain absent. Audiences develop a certain bias for performers based on their previous experiences or reputation and based on the appearance of the performers. If the preconception is negative the performer will have to be outstanding in order to change the opinion, while positive preconceptions hold an expectation the performers must live up to.

Form of Performer
The fact that performers dress up and hide themselves has to do with the willing suspension of disbelief, as audiences need to forget the performer as subject. Costumes, grime, etc. can assist audiences into believing the fictional truth. Likewise, costumes and grime help performers believing the fiction or becoming the character – they help the audience and the performer in developing empathy for the character.
Since the 1970's however theatre language drastically changed and the performer as character became more important, in some cases more important than the character. The focus shifted from the presentation to the interpretation of characters. The appearance of performers became more symbolic and aesthetic then a narrative tool. This leads to loss of empathy in the classic sense, audiences must relate to the performer and the character while earlier they had to connected primarily to the character.
In film and TV-series costumes, grime etc. still *hide* performers more or less, it seems that film and TV invest more in the make-belief than (West-European) theatre. Could this explain why audiences are more easily emotionally engaged with films or TV-series than with theatre? (next to the affect through sound and vision, close ups, etc.)

[70] Stan Lee and Ditko Steve paraphrasing Churchill, Roosevelt and others in *Amazing Fantasy #15 (1962)* which was the first appearance of the character of Spiderman.

Stanislaswki, Meyerhold, Artaud, Grotowski or Strasberg focussed on the physical appearance of performers and found ways to train actors in transforming. Nowadays the Method (by Strasberg), has become a standard in most international performing arts and movies and is taught - in more or less strict form - at most theatre schools. But no matter the changes a performer undergoes there is also the element of perceived quality of the acting, the liking of a certain voice, the engagement of the performer, etc.

One could state that good performers should be able to "leave your troubles outside" (Cabaret, 1972), but that is more easily said than done. Performers *feel* how the audience behaves and will adapt their acting – more or less - to that perception. Audiences' reaction and responses are very frequently discussions in dressing rooms. Audiences are, in this sense, able to change the performance as performers can feel self-assured or lose confidence based on their perceptions of if and how an audience reacts. In this sense, performers need the audience's support from audiences just as much as athletes or popstars do, although the sensitivity of certain scenes does not always allow that. (Different cultures have different relations towards performers, e.g. Flemish audiences are much more reserved than e.g. the audience in London theatres.)

Readiness

It is clear that "that not each and every fictional text has the same effects on all readers." (Nunning, 2015) because audiences and/or performers are for some reason not in a receptive state (see also, Vaughn et al, 2009). Nunning sees willingness and readiness as essential, because in order to have any affect, audiences should encounter fiction "as an end in itself, for pleasure, in a state of immersion".

This is all more easily said than done, therefore I conducted some experiments on the readiness of audiences. We tried to influence the audiences hoping that this would have effect on their opinions, reactions, judgement and ultimately their enjoyment. [71]

We often play in places which are not meant as theatre halls (e.g. old churches, abandoned factories) as we believe that the uniqueness of the space already brings audiences into a certain atmosphere and on the other hand connects all the individuals into a group. But in this case (Borgia Trilogy, Part II, 2012-2014) we had a long run in the same location, thus, we could conduct some audience experiments. We placed all the tables of the foyer in a square (so that everyone faced someone else), or on other nights we made long rows with the tables (so one had to sit next to an unknown). In all cases, we put uncut bread and oil/vinegar on the tables (so people had

[71] We also conducted neurological research on the influence of others in the theatre and on the effects of a video-registration of a performance. The results will be published in the near future.

to cut loafs of bread, and literally shared the bread). The performers were not aware of these changes in the foyer, so when asked afterwards we had hoped they had felt some change in the audience readiness but, sadly enough, they did not feel any tangible differences. In the foyer, however, audiences were much more exuberant. Further experiments, however, should be conducted to obtain more specific results.
Boerner and Jobst (2013) researched the motivation and expectation of audiences when attending a theatre performance. They came up with three determinants:
- thought-provoking impulses
- to be stimulated and to talk to others about a seen performance afterwards
- a performance stimulates audiences to search for additional information (e.g., with regard to the author, the play, or the topic), i.e., need for further information.

Their research, furthermore, revealed that "with the exception of identification, all emotions activated by the fiction (i.e., involvement, empathy) could be confirmed as determinants of visitors' overall evaluation of a theatre visit. In contrast, emotions activated by the artefact (i.e., breaching of norms and values) were not confirmed. Interestingly, empathy is (marginally) negatively related to visitors' overall evaluation … The more empathy spectators feel for the figures in the play, the more negative is their overall evaluation of the theatre visit. However, this effect is very small."
Although a small negative differentiation was found concerning empathy it concurs with the negative differentiation the acting method has on the empathic rapport: Could it be that audiences gradually become aware that empathy with characters is not as innocent or open-ended?

In between: Performers (and their managers) have since long tried to influence the appreciation from audiences. Neighbouring spectators can influence the togetherness of performer and audience; this led to the practice of "clacquers". (Everist, 2002, p. 129-133). It is believed that when emperor Nero gave performances, a group of soldiers was instructed to applaud and cheer. In the 1820s an organised system of such clacquers was organised in the Parisian theatres, exactly to influence and stimulate the audience. There were different types: "the leader, or chef de claque, there were the commissaires, who memorised the better parts of the play and called their neighbours' attention to them; the rieurs, who laughed loudly during comedies; the chatouilleurs ("the ticklers"), who kept the audience in good humour; the pleureuses, women who wept during melodramas; and the bisseurs, who shouted for encores." A modern-day version of these clacquers can be found in comedies that are broadcasted with laugh tracks. (See also: Moran et al. 2003 on humour detection)

2.10. Visual Attraction

When discussing the visual attraction of heroes, the discussion, often focuses on the tension between form and content. The heroic is not limited to splendour but many heroic narratives use such effects to generate affect; to attract audiences and to show the hero in unique and exciting situations. The visual attraction can be traced back to the earliest heroic narratives whereby gods and half gods act in supernatural ways (e.g. characters as Zeus, Aphrodite, Hercules, Achilles or the legendary Minotaur).
Within theatre SFX-effects as in recent Marvel movies are impossible, yet there are commercial companies that focus on the visual experience (Blue Man group, Cirque de Soleil, etc.) but also street theatre tries to attract audiences by its visual attraction. Within certain opera productions and musical one can still find splendour but in most cases West-European theatres will search its visual splendour with light or leave out this tool (often due to financial inhibitions).

Visual attraction is a two-sided knife, on the one hand it attracts audiences but if the moral input, the inspiring force of heroism gets snowed under such action and splendour soon bores audiences. if SFX-effects are overstretched - paradoxically they will undo the hero from its heroic impact. (See also: Hansen, Jancovich and Mann in Part I)
This brings us back to the discussion whether heroic narratives should be used as instructional or entertaining tool (and on possible overlap).

Since most theatre companies do not have the means to spoil their audiences, the sensuality of heroes and the shame at looking at them is a much-used tool in recent years, e.g. performances were audiences must lie in bed with a performer, where they are blinded and whispered to. [72] The physicality (both the looks and the vulnerability that goes with it) is a tool to attract audiences. This has been labelled as experiential theatre and companies as *Punchdrunk* and *ThirdRail* focus fully on the individual experience.

The fitness of heroes and the opportunities to show off these *godly* bodies are seen as tools to attract audiences (in theatre shame because watching, or being a voyeur often occurs)
Well-known female heroes as Wonder Woman, Mystique or Catwoman or male heroes as the Hulk, Silver Surfer or Wolverine are all confirming cliché concepts on gender and sexuality.
Fascinating is the merchandise of heroic costumes, whereby adults dress up as their heroes in order to not only imitate their heroes, but to identify with them, and look as the (attractive) heroes. (as if the stardust of heroes will

[72] Sprookjesbordeel (Toneelhuis), The smile of your face (Ontroerend Goed)

come of, …). Could this be another explanation for the massive success of cosplays and comicons?

One can play with the vulnerability, sensuality and concreteness of bodies and visual attraction (or disgust) in theatre as it is instantly tangible.

Summary:
Personality/Behaviour/Circumstances/Actions/Background/Context/Heroic goal/Form & genre/Creators goal/Text & narrative/Appearance, method & audience/Visual attraction.

2.11. A list of heroic do's and don'ts

In the following pages, I list the commonly accepted do's and don'ts of fictional heroes.
By following, inverting or combining one can develop heroes and circumstances to be heroic in (this list is not exhaustive, but can be used a check-list).

Basically:
Heroes are always at the cross point between reward and investment; heroes trade their efforts, actions and sacrifices with achieving goals.
Heroes must overcome things and ought to behave according to a set of rules.
Just as with the features of Kinsella et al. (2015) the items in red apply to Mac's and hybrid heroes, once again this proves how thin the line between *good* and *bad* heroes is.

Heroes:

- Act as ought to act
- Act under pressure
- Are afraid
- Suppress things in order to achieve the goal
- Must cope with their ideals and moral principles
- Must cope with their choices/circumstance/context
- Transform from victim to saviour
- Transform themselves and/or their context
- Rebel against existing contexts
- Oppose to inequality
- Are the only up to the task (even he/she does not acknowledge that)
- Creates opportunities
- Conquer destiny
- Defy death

Heroes overcome:

- (Personal) fear
- Generation conflicts (older, wiser, younger generations)
- Physical issues (pain, handicaps, …)
- Psychological issues (anxieties, trauma's, …)
- Gender and status
- Personal context, and transcends that to an ideal (e.g. the killing of a child turns him into a freedom fighter)

- Greed, hunger for power, egoism
- Personal contradictions (e.g. strong on the outside, weak on the inside – egoistic, altruistic – in love, impossible love, …)
- Temptation and endurance
- Loneliness and group pressure
- Expectations and experience
- Redemption and grief
- Personal situation

Heroes ought to:

- Empathise, with others and/or other situations
    - To be able to put themselves aside (by doing so become heroic)
    - Not expecting or hope for personal gain/results
- Be moderate and altruistic
- Solve the problems without expecting a higher status
- Accept different and other opinions than their own
- Transcend and inspire
- Combine the otherness and the common
- Live among their peers and followers
- Be consistent with the goal
- Forgive (even the villain)
- Accept the losses
- Be alone and accept that
- Start out from an ethical sense of duty
- Be noble and courageous
- Offer everything they have
- Overcome mistakes and be remorseful
- Take risks (emotionally and in actions) and accept the vulnerability
- Valuate others and/or the goal higher than themselves
- Valuate ideals higher than themselves (they are the tool, not the end)
- Has to be hopeful (in a sense naïve) even when all seems lost
- Accept the fact that rewards are not necessary included
- Defeat status quo
- Accept that love is not necessarily their part
- Consider themselves as un-heroic
- Act at crucial, decisive moments
- Act based on moral paradigms
- Be naïve and smart at the same time
- Be passionate and rational at the same time

Heroes need:

- An inciting incident, a call to adventure
- A challenging context
- To be smart and able to reflect on consequences
- Powerful obstacles
- Personal fear/traumas
- Ideals
- To lose something valuable in order to win
- To be extra-ordinary
- Has to go on where others would stop
- To ignore their own pain
- A fair trade between their sacrifice and the reward

Heroes face problems as:

- Is the villain truly a monster?
- Do the means justify the end?
- What about forgiveness?
- What with collateral damage, overstretching the actions?
- How to evade that the heroic rebel turns into a tyrant?
- How to cope with losses on personal and/or ideological levels?
- How to bring together moral and action?
- How to remain faithful to moral paradigms?
- When can a hero stop being the hero?
- Is the reward for the hero valuable?
- What if the goal is not achieved?
- What if the goal is achieved, what with the heroic status?

Heroic level example
POV Rodrigo (Borgia Trilogy Part I: Homo Carnale)

Act I and II (before interval)

R: Resistance, E: Effort,
Res: Result, St: Stand

Scene	Action	R	E	Res	St
1	Rodrigo Borgia and Guillano della Rovere both enter the election for the papal conclave. Borgia wins by means of bribery. For instance, he promises the cardinals a night with his daughter Lucrezia.	5	6	1	1
2	Della Rovere tries to remind Vanozza, Rodrigo's wife, of the love they once shared	2	0	-2	-1
3	Rodrigo promises Vanozza to give her everything she wants, provided that she will never leave his side	0	4	4	3
4	Rodrigo divides the most important positions in the Vatican among his children. Joffre, the youngest, gets control over the army and has to marry the wealthy Sancia. Cesare, the oldest, desired Joffre's position and is angered. He becomes Rodrigo's second-in-command. Lucrezia, the daughter, is given away in marriage to Giovanni Sforza.	4	6	-2	1
5	Cesare lusts for his sister. He tells her that if he can't have her, nobody can.	2	0	-2	-1
6	Cesare wants Joffre to give up his position as the army's commander	2	0	-2	-3
7	The Borgia salute the people. Cesare refuses to follow their example. He wants Lucrezia. He makes his father promise that her wedding night will not to be consummated.	5	6	-1	-4
8	The three children tease each other. Cesare teases Joffre about his rumoured homosexuality, Joffre teases Cesare about his incestuous desires in return.	1	0	-1	-5
9	Rodrigo teaches Joffre about his marital duties with Sancia. Lucrezia, on the other hand, is told that her wedding will not be consummated. Rodrigo announces a grand wedding feast. Joffre rather wants to be left alone.	3	5	2	-3
10	Rodrigo and Charles, the king of France, greet each other. Charles wants to undertake a crusade, something della Rovere told him to do, but Rodrigo refuses	5	3	2	-1

11	Everyone wants to help organising the wedding feast. The entrance of Sforza interrupts the chaos.	4	2	2	1
Scene	Action	R	E	Res	St
12	Sforza wants to speak to Rodrigo. He is remarkably polite and aloof, which amuses the children. They start to tease him. Finally, Rodrigo arrives, but is dressed as a woman. Charles also enters the party. Rodrigo commences the wedding ritual and weds the two couples.	2	1	1	2
13	The party sings a song to celebrate.	2	0	2	4
14	Sforza offers Lucrezia a life in Milan. Lucrezia, however, tells him that his private life is over.	3	2	1	5
15	Vanozza and della Rovere discuss Rodrigo and their relationship. Vanozza tells him that she might be interested in della Rovere's love again.	3	4	-1	4
16	Vanozza tells Rodrigo he has spent too much money during his election campaign and warns him about della Rovere. They find, however, a solution in finding new dioceses.	4	6	-2	2
17	Charles congratulates Joffre. Both men start to complain about their lives and wives. The conversation, however, takes a sexual turn.	3	2	1	3
18	Lucrezia has sexual desires towards Sforza. Sforza, however, reminds her of the promise they made to Rodrigo and Cesare. Lucrezia leaves angrily.	2	2	0	3
19	Sancia tries to persuade Giovanni to follow her, she believes the two of them should form a team against the Borgia. Joffre bothers them.	3	0	3	6
20	Everybody comes and watches how Joffre has sexual intercourse with Sancia	3	1	2	8
21	Charles threatens Rodrigo, he will attack Rome if he does not get what he wants	5	7	2	10
22	Rodrigo rapes his daughter	10	8	0	8
23	Cesare kills his brother, as revenge for the rape of Lucrezia	10	0	-10	-2

Conclusions & further research

Over the past few years I have, both as researcher and as creator, been rewarded with many enriching encounters and had the opportunity to create and research simultaneously. I hope that this text and the models I propose can lead to further discussions.

In the following pages, I shortly summarize the findings and results of this research project:

Often, the incentive to create narratives can be found in what happens in societies. Simultaneously, narratives can influence that society. Because of this reciprocal connection between fiction and reality, heroes - as a widely used protagonist - have the possibility of acting *in* the narrative and *out* of the narrative. This double function or impact is, in my opinion, one of the reasons fictional heroes, time and time again, are created by creators and discussed by audiences. I conclude that heroes not only provide exemplary behaviour or try-outs for audiences *out* of the narrative but that they also have the ability to entertain, console while audience are *in* the narrative.

Heroes have the capacity of both seducing and consoling audiences, they have an instructive aura which allows them to have deeper impact on their audiences. Exactly because of that heroic status, it seems, audiences are more willing to accept them (and their, often, ambiguous behaviour). The label *hero* seems to give characters agency which allows heroes to influence their audiences in a (more) profound way. Creators have gracefully used this agency to develop fictional characters that invite (and challenge) audiences to step into to the shoes of these heroes: To take part *in* the narrative through empathy and to reflect on the hero and the evoked empathy *out* of the narrative.

In my opinion, fictional heroes are the glue between the creators *want* and the audiences *need*, because of their mouldable nature heroes have been used since the earliest times and will, most likely, be used in the centuries to come. Heroes are a sign of the times, they are the mirror and the hammer of societies as they are formed to the contextual and artistic needs.

Empathy and heroes

Empathy is considered as essential in prosocial behaviour and because of that empathy could provide shelter, bring consolation within communities. Without empathy, it seems, communities are unlikely to exist over a longer period of time. Empathy is the ingredient which connects individuals and melts them together as a community.

I hope to have shown that heroes, in most cases, defend *their* community, that they develop more or less empathy for that specific community. Heroes use their developed empathy as the base to act and defend their specific community (this could mean that heroes exclude or even *attack* another community).
In my opinion, there is a clear connection between heroism and empathy, the one cannot live without the other. If actions occur without a certain degree of empathy, we must speak, in my opinion, of stunts (I believe that undertaking a heroic action in itself does not equals being a hero).
Therefore, I conclude that empathy is the trigger for heroism.

Because of that connection, we should not be surprised that heroes inflict empathy on others, that their empathic reactions lead to an empathic response of audiences. This brings me to the second conclusion; heroes are developed and equipped with tools to attract empathy.
Heroes are created in such a way that they realize effect (and affect). Their actions are created in such a way that they can be admired by awe-struck audiences and thus, ultimately, can be enjoyed by audiences.
Heroes are creations who actively seek empathy.

Aristotle provided us with the reward and punishment model as possible moral outcome of narratives. This concept is still very widely accepted and used as most stories will, in their final resolution, reward the *good* and punish the *bad*. This reward and punishment concept has been regarded as both beneficial and as a dangerous effect for spectators; according to Nussbaum or Booth narratives can *teach* or instruct audiences while Keen or Breithart saw dangers in the usage of narratives in reality.
I, from my part, fear not so much the opposing opinions but the instrumental discussions as if the arts and narratives are nothing more than a practical extension of something else, as an explanation or exemplar.

Narratives can, as Booth claims have try-out effects on audiences as narratives present certain solutions to certain problems. Audiences can in their own ultra-personal way keep track of these fictional solutions and *use* them in their personal lives. This, however, is a personal process and this personal experience should, in my opinion, not be proclaimed as being true or false (as e.g. Nussbaum and Keen have done repeatedly in their defence or attack on the empathic or moral value of narratives).

Empathy is an essential element in heroism as it connects the hero with its community, this empathy in itself can lead to an empathic reaction from audiences. Paradoxically, most heroes will only develop empathy for a community and thus ignore the inflicted pain or misfortune of others.

Heroes are able to develop a strong empathy and because of that are able to sacrifice themselves; without such a strong emotional and cognitive connection to the *other* heroes would not be able to be heroes. (Therefore, I believe, there is a difference between heroism and supererogatory acts.)

Empathy and morality

Empathic feelings are commonly seen as being positive, beneficial and altruistic. I hope to have shown that I do not necessarily connect being *good* with developed feelings of empathy: One can develop empathy for those who hold immoral and/or amoral viewpoints and empathy is not necessarily altruistic.

The ambiguity of empathy has been essential throughout this research project. In order to develop the hybrid hero, I drew from different research fields, by doing so I came across concepts that challenge the alleged connection between empathy and being good.

Audiences can develop empathy for fictional immoral characters since audiences can be blinded by the background, context and the personal reasoning or justification of their heroes. Next to that the form of the action (the splendour, the guts, the cool-factor) and the tunnel vision by which such actions are regarded as necessary help audiences into accepting - temporarily and within the narratives' context - moral behaviour one would cast away as *wrong* in reality.

Fiction can lure audiences into accepting what they would normally oppose to, this feature of narrating is the logic consequence of the belief that narratives can leave positive traces in audiences' mind. If we accept that good moral lessons are an essential element of narratives then *wrong* or ambiguous lessons will also play their part.

Creators are, in my opinion, not responsible for the consequences of the empathy their narratives evoke, although in most cases they will be, more or less, able to predict reactions (often even actively search for polarizing reactions). When creators work with propaganda, then of course they are fully responsible for the effects within audiences, it will even be the measure of their success.

Audiences can - due to their beliefs, a specific point in their life - attribute more or less importance to a narrative as they can be more or less perceptive for the narrative (they can also overinterpret, overidentificate, reverse fact and fiction, etc.).

Heroes and morality

Just as there is no essential link between empathy and morality there is, in my opinion, no essential link between heroes and moral behaviour. One can act heroic, care for a community without being *good.* Although being *good* is often seen as an essential element of heroism, flawed and hybrid heroes play with such expectations and by doing so question heroism and its alleged beneficial impact.

Next to that, morality is bendable when one wants to achieve a goal. Heroes can acknowledge they act *bad* in order to defend the *good*. Or, as with hybrid heroes, concepts as good and bad are seen as instrumental, even as accessory in the course of the heroic journey.

Of course, one could claim that the moment a character behaves immoral or amoral he or she loses the heroic label, but that would exclude many characters because behaving bad, or at least ambiguous, seems implicit in most narratives.

Seeing heroism as something that is solely good and morally acceptable would leave out many well-known protagonists but furthermore would leave out the struggle of these characters to become *good* as the journey of the hero is often the road towards something better for the hero and his community.

Heroes challenge moral paradigms and by doing so they are not the exemplary leaders many philosophers (as Nussbaum or de Botton) want to make of them. In my opinion, the struggle, the loss, the defeat is essential in narratives and not the conquest or the victory.

To paraphrase my promotor Bart Philipsen in a recent talk (2017), "Literature begins there were ambiguity slips in."

Hybrid heroes

This research project has proposed the concept of the hybrid hero, a label to describe a contemporary interpretation of heroism in fiction. This hybrid hero stands on the shoulders of other heroic types and uses characteristics and features from both the classic hero and villain. Its main purpose is to polarise and provoke reflection and discussion. The empathy these hybrid heroes can inflict within audiences is their crux, as they challenge empathy, morality and the beneficial impact of narratives and heroes by actively glorifying themselves as counter-example.

(It should not surprise us that the hybrid hero is mostly used in TV series as in recent times TV series and the different platforms they are broadcasted on, seem to have taken an important position in diffusing narratives.)

The hybrid hero is a character that, in my opinion, found its genesis in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and answers the fears, dreams, hopes and anxieties of its contemporary audiences. The audiences of this shattered

world in transition seem to be fond of heroes who do not behave in a clear-cut way but are searching ways to achieve their goals not matter the cost. The main difference with other or earlier flawed heroes is their active search for empathy. Hybrid heroes play with the empathy audiences can develop for fictional characters and because of that will most likely only be appreciated after a learning process (as elements as paradox, counter-exemplary, amorality play an important role).

Paradoxically, the absence of morality within hybrid heroes emphasises the morality. Therefore, the hybrid hero is a moral character.

The hybrid hero is a contemporary heroic model, only time will tell how long and to which extent the hybrid hero will survive.

- Heroes act based on empathy for a specific community, audiences in their own turn can develop empathy for fictional heroes. This empathy can lead to the acceptance of immoral behaviour.

- Heroes are creations who actively search impact, therefore creators use tools to seduce audiences.

- Creators are in most cases influenced by society when creating heroes. Likewise, fictional heroes can influence societies.

- Hybrid heroes play with the empathy they can realise, because of their ruthless ways they inflict (moral) reflection within audiences.

- The hybrid hero is a counter-exemplary moral figure the world seems to need in today's times.

Further research?

If there is one thing I can conclude than it must be that ambiguous heroes still hold many secrets and challenges in many research fields. This research project has tried to develop a series of thoughts that hopefully trigger others to reflect on the matter.

There are many questions that come up when asked how this research could continue.
Some could focus on the temporality of hybrid heroism or on its moral boundaries: To what extend is fictional justification of villainy acceptable? Where does fiction transgress its own limits? What if hybrid heroes become the new normal and no longer polarise?
On a broader scale we would ask ourselves when are heroes no longer heroes? What should one do, to lose its heroic status and what would one then be?

What about the moral impact of narratives; do we indeed live in a post-heroic, post-ideological era (Mann, 2014)? Whereby the splendour of the heroic prevails its inspirational value? Has heroism been nullified overtime?

We could research the recuperation of historical heroes (by politicians, business leaders, etc.) as a mean to gain agency, to place themselves in line with such historical heroes?
Are we devaluating heroes by such instrumental usage or is recuperation one of the way heroes can survive and/or instruct contemporary audiences?

Is it so that heroes lead their audiences into a growing habituation of violence or moral decay? Are contemporary heroes (both the hybrid and the franchised heroes) dangerous examples with immoral impact?

Is the massive production of heroic narratives and commercial exploitation of heroism nefast for its inspirational input? Or is the amount of heroic narratives something that must be encouraged?

How will the form and content of heroic narratives evolve now that more and more people experience narratives on mobile and social media?

Can the theatre play a role in further developing hybrid heroism?

Is the reality of attending theatre performances a tool to generate affect and effect within audiences?

(for more on heroes and heroism I highly recommend the work of the colleagues at the University of Freiburg, SFB 948) who since 2012 have intensively researched all different forms, representations and effects of heroes now and in the past, https://www.sfb948.uni-freiburg.de)

Archives & Residencies

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The *French Revolution Digital Archive* (*FRDA*) *Archives parlementaires* and *Images de la Revolution française* - Stanford University Libraries and the Bibliothèque nationale de France

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Index